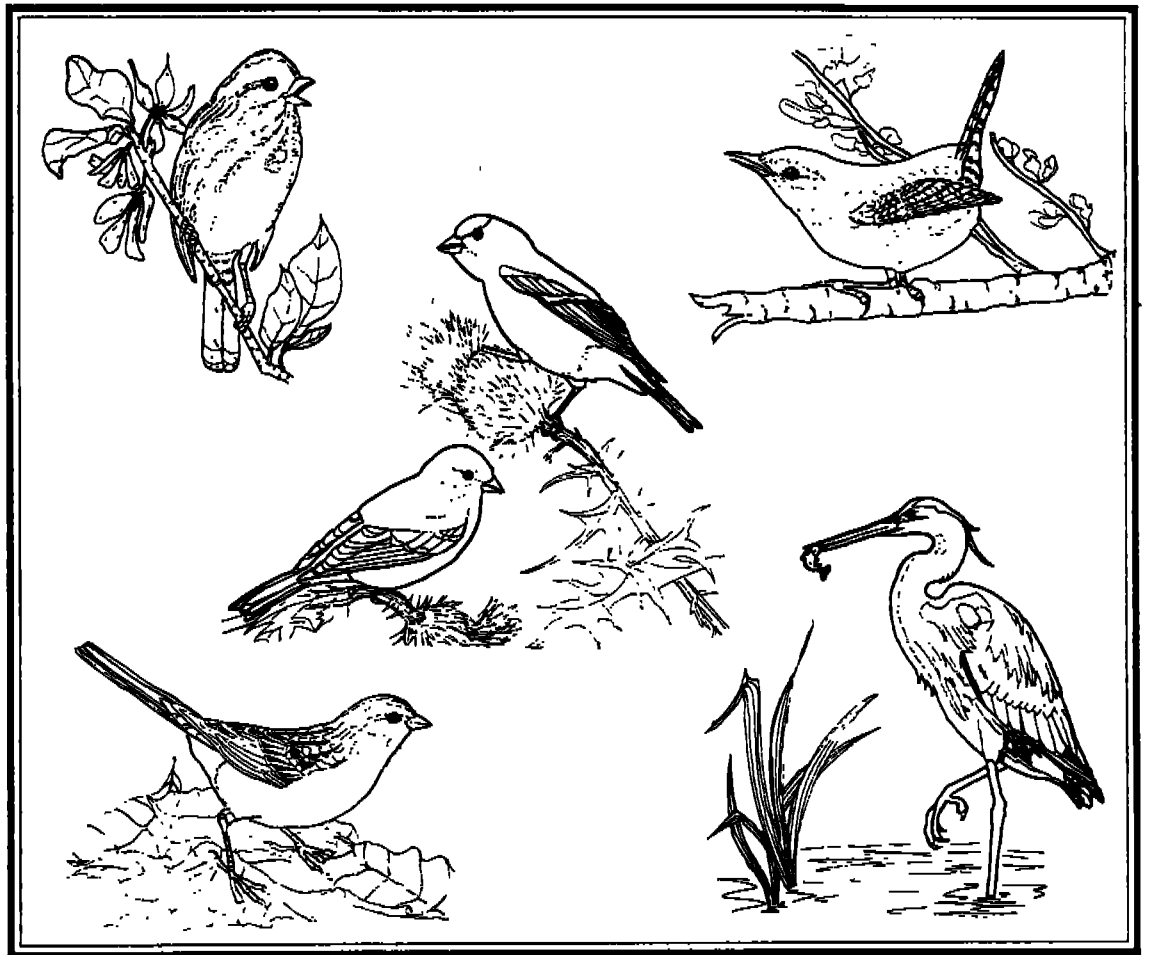




# WATCHING WASHINGTON BIRDS



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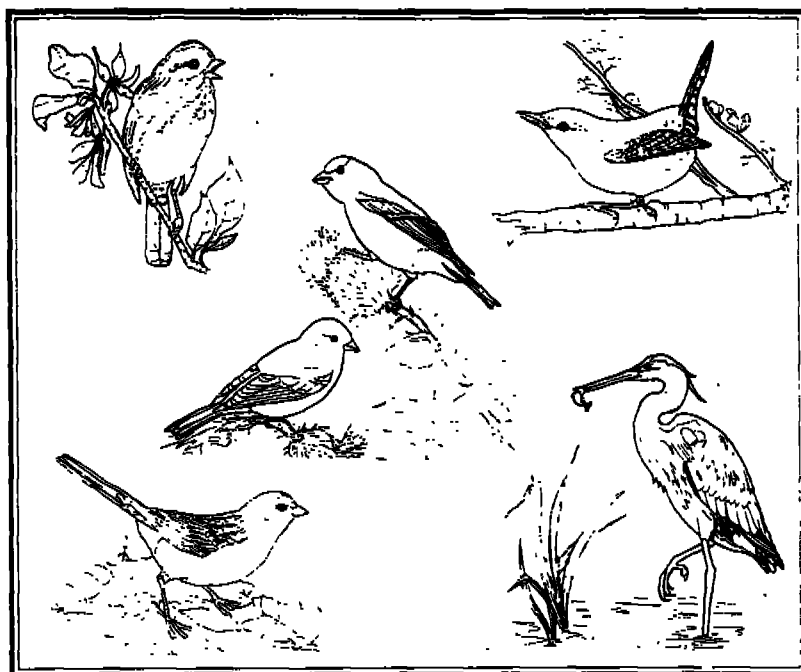
Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

**By Stephen & Sandra Penland  
Urban Wildlife Program**

**Serving Washington's wildlife and people — now and in the future**

# **WATCHING WASHINGTON BIRDS**

**Birds You Can See in Your Own Backyard**



**Prepared by Stephen & Sandra Penland  
Washington Department of Wildlife**

**Illustrated by Nicola Yarbrough  
Cover Design by Pamela Thompson**

**With special thanks to the following organizations:  
Knoll Lumber Co., Northshore Rotary and Woodinville Rotary**

# CITY BIRDS

**The birds on pages 2-4 can be found in downtown areas of cities and towns in Washington State. They may also be found in neighborhoods and around farms.**

**Things to think about for city birds:**

- 1. Some birds in Washington State were brought here from other countries. Which birds are these?**

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- 2. What do you think might happen to birds in a certain area when new kinds of birds from other parts of the world are put there to live?**

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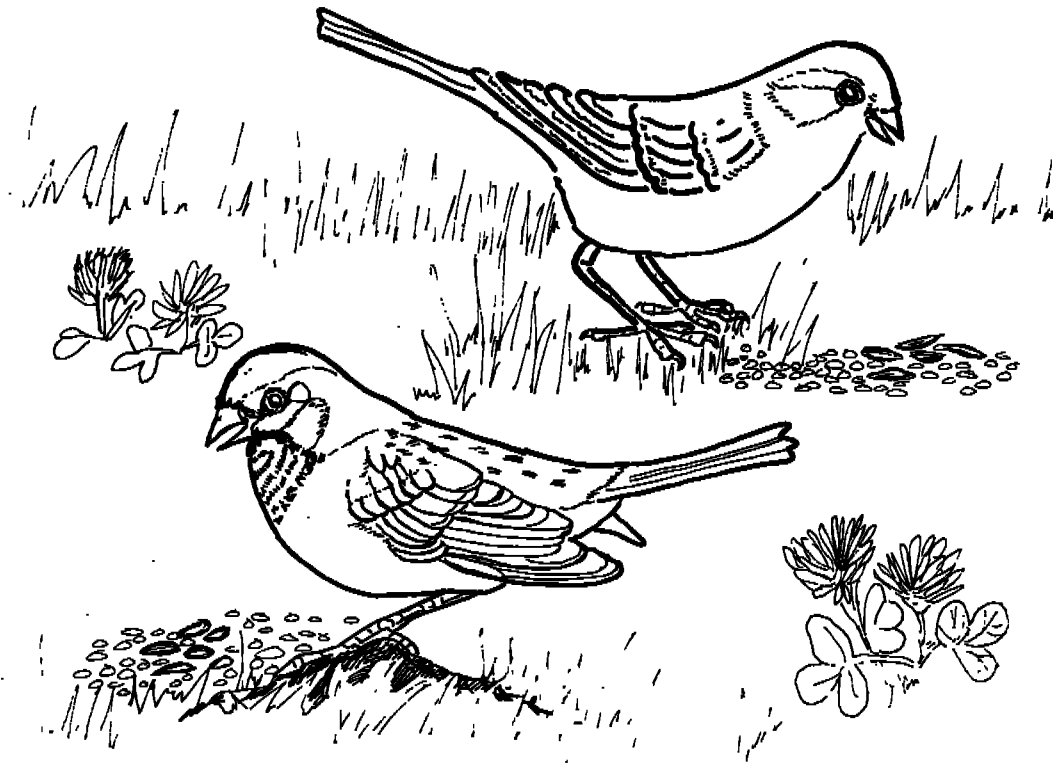
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## HOUSE SPARROW

House sparrows were brought to this country in the 1800's. Because they came from England, some people call them "English sparrows".

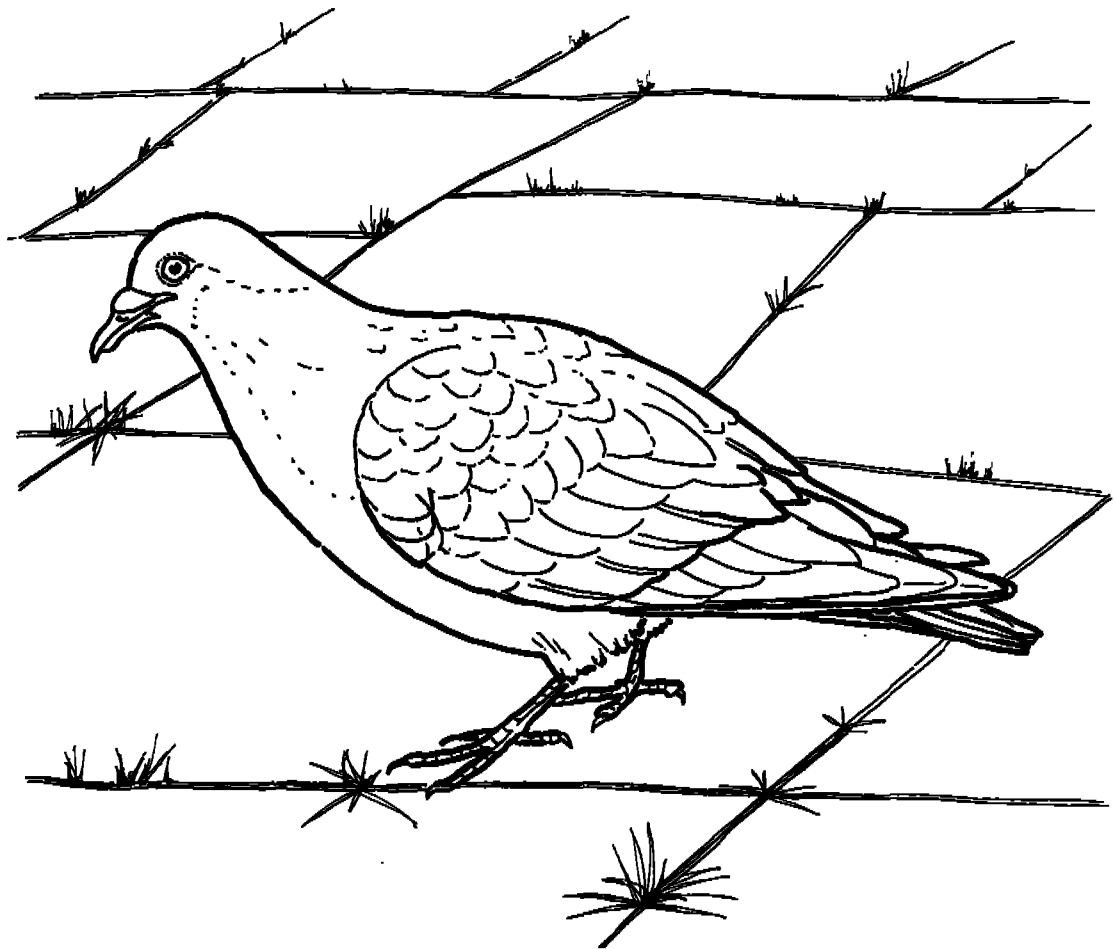
**Diet**— House sparrows eat seeds. They like weed seeds and seeds found in bird feeders. The young house sparrows are fed insects; watch the adults in May and June as they chase after insects for their offspring.

**Nesting**— House sparrows usually nest in a hole in a house or other building. They make their nest out of straw, grasses, string, and cloth. They line it with feathers, hair, and wool. Usually the nest is shaped like a cup, but sometimes it is built like a dome. House sparrows also like to nest in bird houses. House sparrows lay 3 to 5 eggs in April, May, or June that are incubated for 2 weeks. The young

birds spend about 2 more weeks in the nest before they learn to fly.

**Colors**— House sparrows are mostly brown with the back darker than the belly. Males have gray on the top of their head and a black bib below their bill. Females are plainer. House sparrows often mix with house finches. The female house sparrow has a plain belly, while the female house finch has streaks on its belly.

If there are too many house sparrows around your house, try using smaller feeders that keep out sparrows. Don't let birdseed spill onto the ground, and don't throw bread out for birds. Use sunflower seeds as much as possible - house sparrows don't like them. Use a small entrance hole in your bird house; sparrows need a hole about 1-1/4 inch in diameter.



## ROCK DOVE (PIGEON)

Rock doves are also called pigeons. Like the starling and house sparrow, rock doves were brought over from Europe by our early settlers. Pigeon breeders have created many kinds of pigeons of different colors. Sometimes these birds escape and join the more common grayish varieties of pigeons.

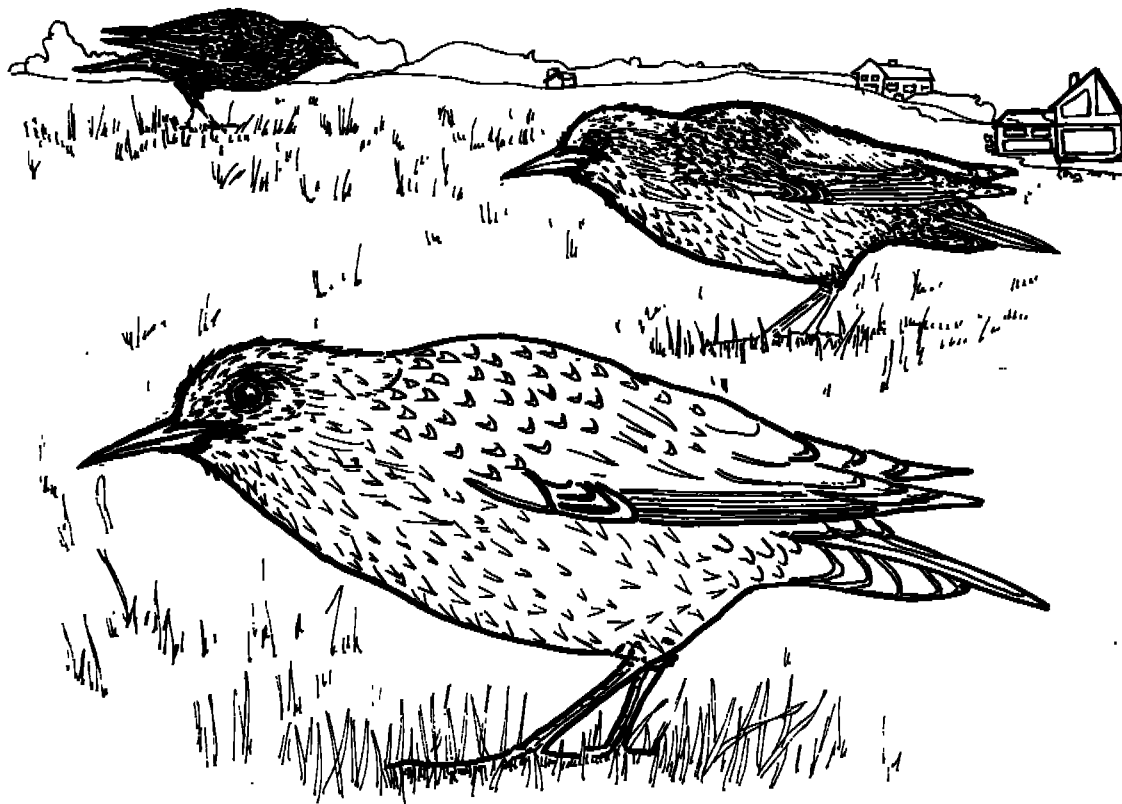
**Diet**— Rock doves eat seeds. That's why there are so many pigeons around grain elevators. Pigeons in cities eat seeds of weeds and handouts from people. Sometimes pigeons fly out to fields far from town to eat corn, wheat, and other crops leftover after harvest.

**Nesting**— Rock doves nest on cliffs. As far as they are concerned, the tall buildings in Seattle, Spokane, and other cities are the next best thing to a real cliff. They also nest on ledges under bridges and under the over-

hanging eaves of some houses. Rock doves often nest together in colonies. They don't make much of a nest - it is usually just some twigs and stems thrown together. Rock doves lay 2 eggs that are incubated for 2-1/2 weeks. The young birds leave the nest when they are around one month old.

**Colors**— Most rock doves are dark gray, and their head and neck is darker than their back. Most have a white rump patch and a dark band across the end of their tail.

Areas in western Washington often have a relative of the rock dove - the **Band-tailed pigeon**. If you see a pigeon resting in a tree, it is probably a band-tailed pigeon (rock doves like to rest on buildings). Band-tailed pigeons eat seeds and fruits.



## STARLING

Starlings haven't always lived in this country. They were brought here from England in 1890. Since then they have learned to live nearly everywhere in North America. Starlings have been in Washington since 1950.

Starling habitat is found wherever people live. They are common around farms, ranches, small towns, and big cities everywhere. Starlings usually stay together in large flocks that may have thousands of birds. The noise and mess they make may cause problems for people.

**Diet**— Starlings eat anything, especially insects and berries. They often look for insects in lawns.

**Nesting**— Starlings make nests in the holes they find in buildings, bridges, and other structures. They also nest in bird houses and cavities

in trees. Starlings are a problem when they drive away woodpeckers, chickadees, and other cavity-nesting birds.

The nest is untidy and made of stems, leaves, and other parts of plants. It is lined with feathers, wool, and moss. Starlings lay 5 to 7 eggs that are incubated for 2 weeks in April. The young birds stay in the nest for another 3 weeks. Even after they learn to fly, the young birds continue to beg for food from the parents.

**Colors**— Starlings have shiny black feathers and a long, yellow bill. During the winter the feathers have white tips, so the birds look speckled. The young birds are grayish brown. Look for the short, square tail when the birds fly or sit on a wire. Starlings make strange noises: squeaks, warbles, and chirps. They can also imitate the songs of other birds.

# BACKYARD BIRDS

**The birds on pages 6-17 can often be found in backyard habitats of cities and towns across Washington. Many of them can also be found in parks, forests, and other natural areas.**

**Things to think about for backyard birds:**

- 1. How is a backyard different from the downtown part of a city as far as birds are concerned?**

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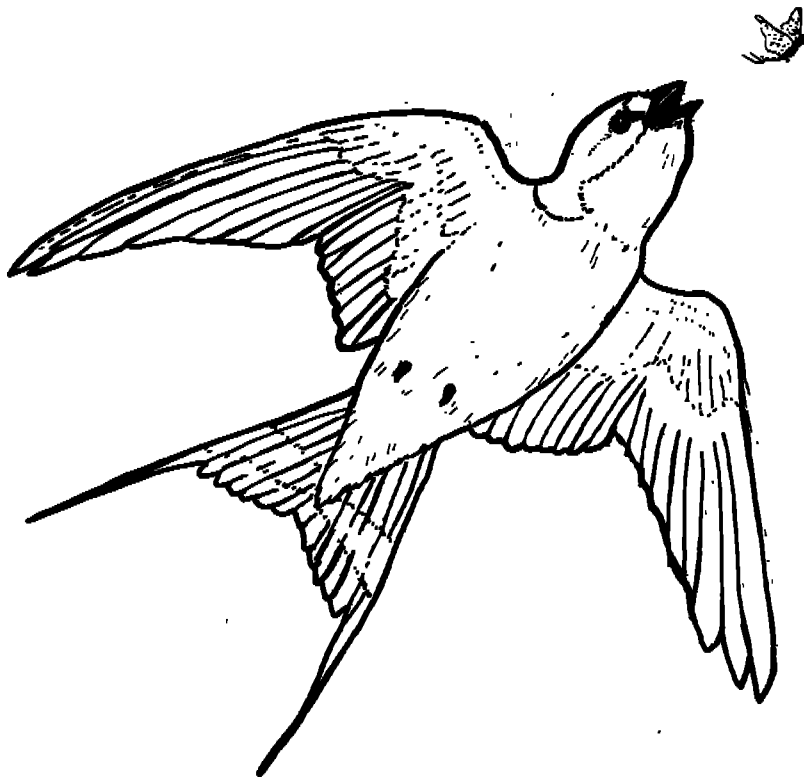
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- 2. Why do you think there are more kinds of birds that live in backyard habitat than in downtown habitat?**

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## BARN SWALLOW

Barn swallows are in Washington only during the spring and summer months. There aren't enough flying insects during our cold winters for swallows to survive. They migrate south in September and October.

**Diet**— Swallows eat mosquitoes and other flying insects. They have a large mouth to catch insects as they swoop through the air.

**Nesting**— Barn swallows build a mud cup lined with parts of plants and feathers. When you see swallows around a small mud puddle, they are getting a mouthful of mud to take back to their nest site. The nests are placed on a small ledge. Swallows used to build their nests inside caves. Today, however, there are more ledges and shelves around buildings and bridges. Barn swallows now use these

man-made ledges for their nest sites.

Barn swallows usually lay 4 to 5 eggs in May that are incubated by the female. Young birds stay in the nest about 3 weeks before learning to fly. After the young leave the nest, the adults continue to feed them. Young birds are sometimes fed in mid-air!

**Colors**— Barn swallows are easy to identify because of their long, forked tail. Their upper side is a dark bluish-black. Barn swallows have a reddish-brown throat and a cinnamon belly. Young birds have a shorter tail and a whitish belly.

Another swallow that is common in many neighborhoods is the **violet-green swallow**. It is dark green above with a white underside. Violet-green swallows nest in bird houses and other cavities.



## BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Many people know the black-capped chickadee, because its call sounds like its name - "chick-a-dee-dee chick-a-dee-dee-dee". The black-capped chickadee's favorite habitat is open woodlands, shrubby thickets, and large parks. It will probably be found in your neighborhood if there are trees and shrubs.

**Diet**— Chickadees often travel in flocks with other kinds of birds during the winter. They like to eat insects, but they usually have to eat seeds during the cold months when insects are hard to find. You can get chickadees to come to your feeder if you have suet or sunflower seeds.

**Nesting**— Black-capped chickadees nest inside a tree cavity. They often use old woodpecker holes. Chickadees might use a bird house in your yard,

too. The entrance hole should be 1-1/8 inch in diameter. The chickadees first use moss to make the base of their nest. Then they add plant fibers, hair, wool, and feathers to make the cup. The female lays 6 to 8 eggs in April or May. The eggs are incubated for 2 weeks, and the young birds stay in the nest for about 16 days before learning to fly.

**Colors**— The black-capped chickadee has black head and throat, white cheek patch, and a grayish body; the back is darker than the belly. Another chickadee, the **chestnut-backed chickadee**, has a reddish back and sides. Chestnut-backed chickadees are most common in areas with lots of evergreen trees. Another kind of chickadee in eastern Washington, the **mountain chickadee**, has a white stripe over the eye.



## BUSHTIT

The bushtit is a tiny bird, even smaller than a chickadee. Bushtits are not found in eastern Washington. They usually travel in a large flock of 30 or more birds. Their favorite habitat is open woodlands, parks, and gardens. Bushtits may be common in your neighborhood if there are lots of low trees and tall shrubs.

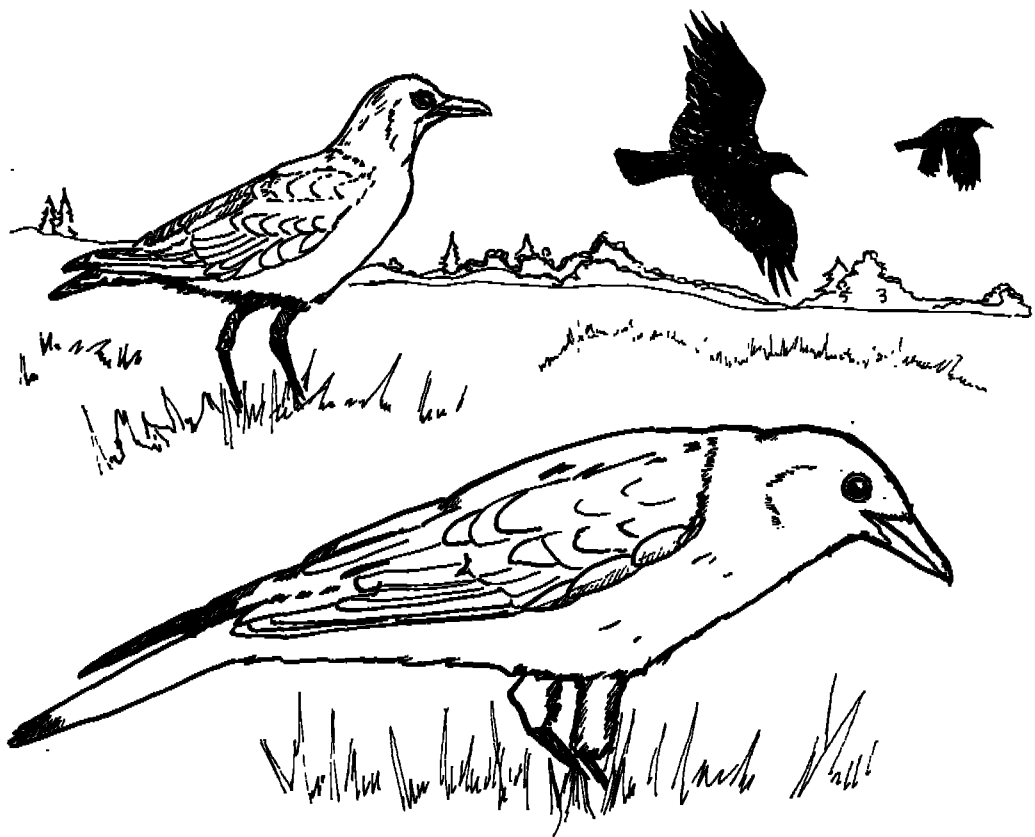
**Diet**— Bushtits eat insects in the summer. During the cold winter when insects are hard to find, bushtits look for insect eggs or dormant insects in cracks in the bark. After a flock has found all of the insects on one tree, bushtits “follow the leader” and fly one-by-one to the next tree. Bushtits usually don’t come to a birdfeeder. But if they do, they like suet the best.

If one bushtit spots a predator like a hawk, it sounds the alarm and all the bushtits will quickly dive into shrubs

near the ground for safety. Protection from danger is one reason why many birds spend most of the year travelling together in large flocks.

**Nesting**— In the spring, each pair of bushtits builds a long, hanging nest with a hole in the side near the top. The nest looks like a sock hanging from a branch. The nest is made of mosses, lichens, grasses, and spider webs. The female lays 5 to 7 white eggs in March or April. After the eggs hatch, both parents bring insects to the young birds. After 2 weeks, the young birds and the parents leave the nest to form a flock with other families of bushtits.

**Colors**— Bushtits are grayish-brown, with their back darker than their belly. The bushtit’s tail is long compared to other birds its size.



## AMERICAN CROW

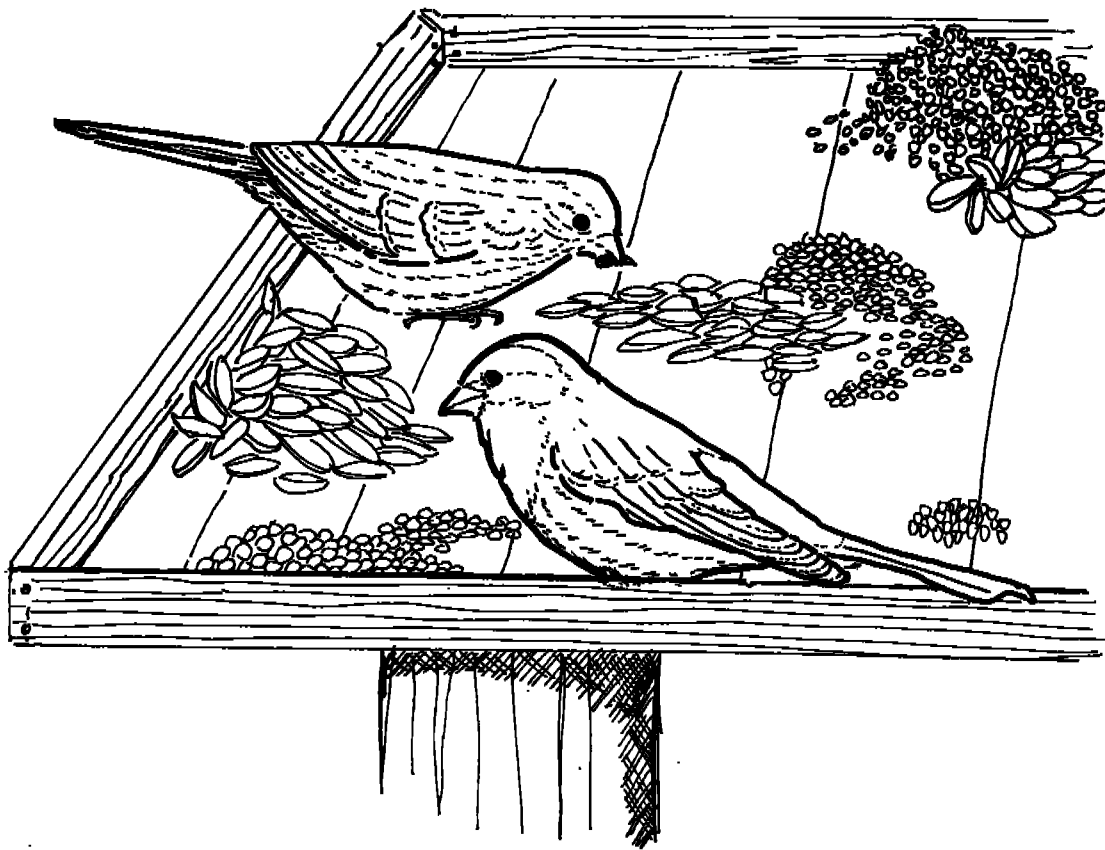
You can see many crows in most neighborhoods, especially where there are tall evergreen trees. There seem to be more and more crows in areas where people live. What do you think are some reasons why there may be more crows in towns today than there were many years ago?

Crows are smart birds. They can learn how to survive in certain areas of town. In fact, they can even learn which people are friendly to them and which people might be dangerous.

**Diet**—Crows will eat anything, including insects, berries, seeds, garbage, and dead animals on roads. They will also eat eggs and babies of other kinds of birds, and some people don't like to have crows around for this reason.

**Nesting**—Crows build a large nest of sticks and twigs up high in tall evergreen trees. The nests are lined with strips of bark, grasses, hair, moss, and sometimes mud. They lay 4 to 5 eggs in April or May. The eggs are incubated for 18 days, and the young stay in the nest for about 35 days. After the young leave the nest, they continue to beg for food from the parents. Listen for their higher-pitched cawing sounds during July and August.

**Colors**—Crows are all black. Another bird that is sometimes mistaken for a crow is the **raven**. Ravens are larger and have a heavier bill. Ravens rarely come into towns; they prefer to live in the mountains and countryside.



## HOUSE FINCH

The house finch is one of the most common birds around bird feeders. Nearly every backyard in Washington can have house finches.

House finches moved to Washington from the southwest portion of the United States during the 1940's. The growth of cities and new highways connecting them have helped house finches move to new areas.

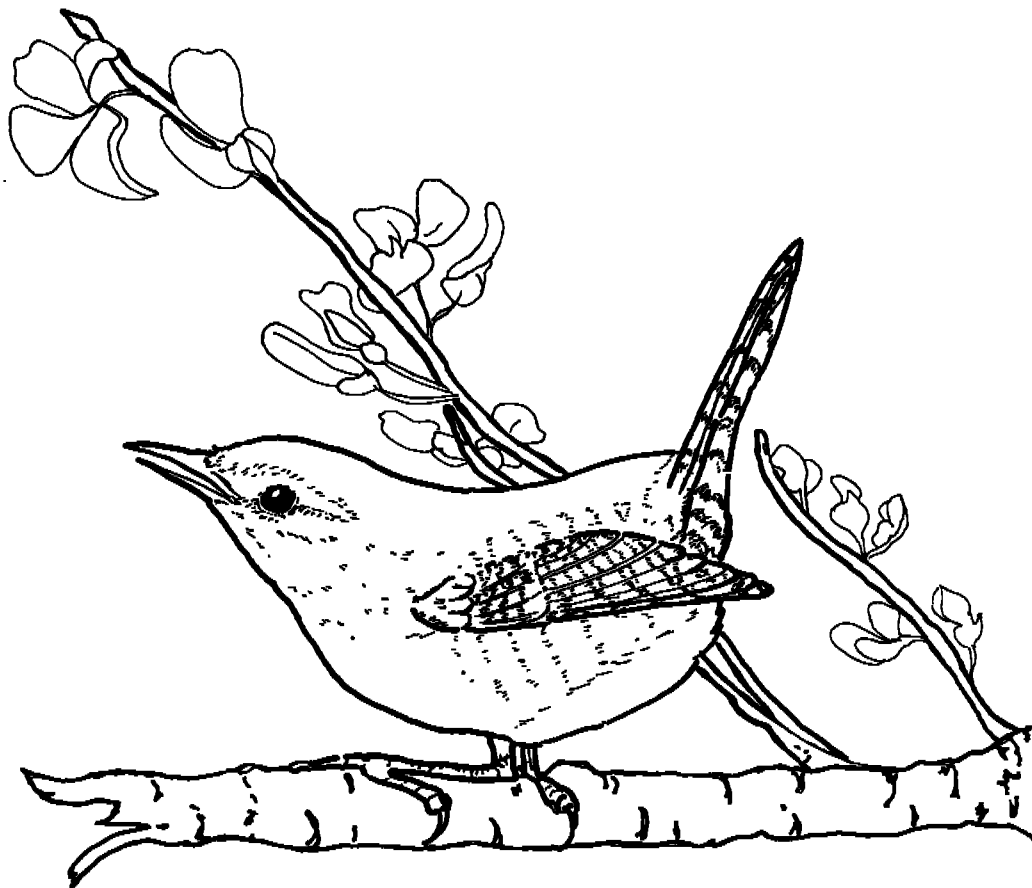
**Diet**— House finches like to eat seeds. They are especially fond of sunflower seeds, although they will also eat millet. House finches will eat the sugar water in a hummingbird feeder if they can get to it.

**Nesting**— Finches build nests in many locations. They will build a cup in a tree or shrub, in vines next to a house, on a ledge, or even in a bird-house. If you want to find a house

finch's nest, put out some short pieces of string or yarn in April. When the female house finch picks up the string to use in building her nest, you can follow her to her chosen spot. Be careful not to disturb the bird by getting too close.

Male house finches have a pleasant song that they sing in the spring. Look for them on wires or other high locations where they try to be seen by other birds while they sing.

**Colors**— Male house finches have a reddish head that extends down onto its chest. Sometimes the male finch is colored orange or yellow instead of red. The female house finch is all brown, but it has streaks on the top of its head and the sides of its belly. They look much like the female house sparrow, but the sparrow does not have the brown streaks.



## HOUSE WREN

The house wren is found in Washington only during the spring and summer months. In the winter it migrates south to Mexico. The house wren is more common in eastern Washington than the west side of the state.

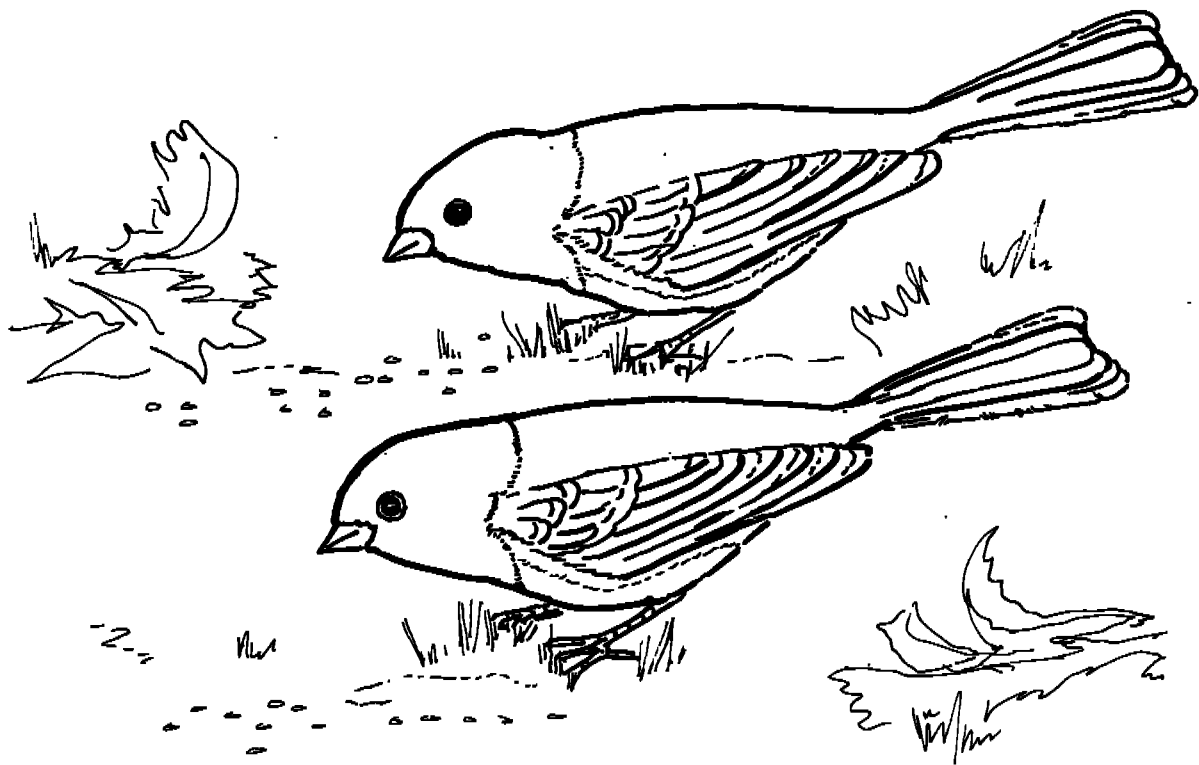
House wrens are most common in dry, open woodlands with lots of shrubby thickets. It is especially common where there are old trees or rundown buildings, because it uses these for its nest site.

**Diet**— House wrens are good to have around because they eat insects. They usually don't come to feeders, but if they do they like suet the best.

**Nesting**— House wrens nest in cavities. Any cavity will do - in a tree, between rocks, in a wood pile, or in a bird house. House wrens have even

nested in the pocket of a pair of pants hanging outside on a clothesline! The nest is made of twigs, stems, leaves, and other material. It is lined with feathers, hair, wool, and other soft things. The female lays 6 to 8 eggs in May that take about 2 weeks to hatch.

**Colors**— House wrens are mostly brown, with the backside darker than the belly. Like the other wrens, they have short wings and a short tail that is usually tilted up. The tail has black and brown barring. The **winter wren** looks similar but is smaller and has an even shorter tail; it is found in moist, dense forests with lots of logs and shrubs.



## DARK-EYED JUNCO

Some people give juncos the name of "snowbirds" because they are usually seen in flocks in winter. Most of the juncos spend the spring and summer higher up in the mountains.

Like other birds, juncos form flocks in winter for protection against predators. If one bird spots a predator, it quickly gives an alarm call and flies into a dense tree. As it flies, it flashes its white outer tail feathers as an emergency signal to the other birds. Look for the white flashes when juncos fly away from you.

**Diet**—Juncos prefer to eat seeds on the ground. When other birds spill seeds from a feeder, juncos often clean up the mess below. Their favorite seed is millet.

**Nesting**—Juncos usually make their nest on the ground, with protec-

tion from tree roots, stumps, rocks, or shrubs. They sometimes nest in hanging plant baskets on people's patios in more rural areas. The nest is made of thin twigs, dry grass, strips of bark, and hair. They lay 3 to 5 eggs that are incubated for about 12 days. The young birds stay in the nest for 10 to 13 days before learning to fly.

**Colors**—Male juncos have a blackish hood that is darker in some birds than in others. Their back and sides are brown, and the breast is white. The wings and tail are dark, but the outer tail feathers are white. Females have similar colors but they are more drab, and their hood is not as dark.



## EVENING GROSBEAK

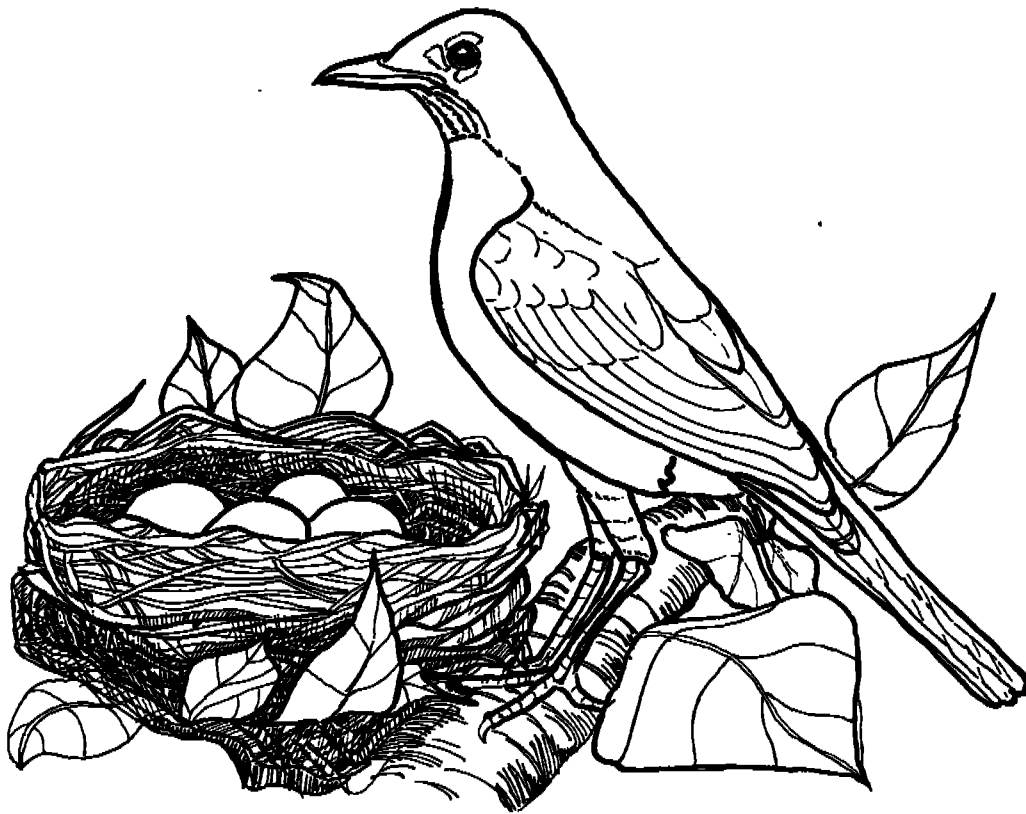
Evening grosbeaks are large, yellowish birds that have a huge beak. They are usually seen in a flock in yards during the winter. Grosbeaks will come to your yard if there are tall trees around, especially evergreens and maples.

**Diet**— Grosbeaks absolutely love sunflower seeds and can eat about seven seeds in one minute. See how long it takes you to eat that many without using your hands. Grosbeaks also like the seeds of maples and elms. They keep calling to each other with a single, loud whistle while they eat. You can feed them sunflower seeds put on a large tray or on the ground.

**Nesting**— Evening grosbeaks nest in the mountains in evergreen forests. The female builds a very fragile nest of twigs, mosses, and lichens. Very few

nests of evening grosbeaks have ever been found in Washington, even though they nest here. They lay 3 to 4 eggs that take about 2 weeks to hatch. The young birds stay in the nest for another 2 weeks before learning to fly.

**Colors**— The male evening grosbeak has a yellow forehead and eyebrow, brownish head and neck, and yellow body. Its wings are black with a white patch, and the tail is also black. The female is more grayish-tan instead of yellow.



## AMERICAN ROBIN

The robin is one of the most common birds in towns across the United States. Its habitat is forests, along streams and rivers, and in city parks and home gardens.

**Diet**—Robins eat fruit and insects. Their favorite fruits are from hawthorn, holly, and pyracantha. Watch how a robin cocks its head to the side as it hunts for worms. Some people think it is listening for worms, but that is not true. The robin has to tilt its head to see the worms because its eyes are on the sides of its head.

**Nesting**—Robins build a nest in a tree, shrub, or on a protected ledge of a building. The nest is made of twigs, grass, stems of weeds, and lined with mud and thin grasses. The female usually lays 4 blue eggs that are incubated for 2 weeks. The young are fed

insects, and they leave the nest about 2 weeks after hatching.

The robin's song in the spring is a loud "*cheerily cheer-up cheerio*", and they often start singing before sunrise. Their call is a rapid "*tut tut tut*". Like other birds, only the male sings. People sometimes think birds sing because they are happy, but birds sing for other reasons. The song is the bird's way of telling other males to stay out of his territory. It is also an invitation to a female to come live with him.

**Colors**—The male robin has a dark head, gray-brown back, black streaks on a white chin, and a brick red underside. The female's head is lighter in color and its underside is a lighter orange. When there are many robins on your lawn, see if you can tell the males from the females.



## RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Hummingbirds are like miniature flying jewels. Their small size, bright colors, and amazing speed have made them a favorite of people for centuries.

There are four kinds of hummingbirds in Washington, but only the rufous hummingbird lives on both sides of the Cascades. It migrates to our state in March. It returns once again to the southwest and Mexico in August. The other hummingbird in western Washington is the **Anna's** hummingbird. Eastern Washington also has the **calliope** and **black-chinned** hummingbirds. The calliope is the smallest bird in North America.

**Diet**— Hummingbirds eat nectar from flowers as well as small insects. You can attract hummingbirds to your yard if you have the flowers they like. Most flowers that are red and shaped like an open tube that narrows toward

the end will attract hummingbirds. You can also add a hummingbird feeder to your garden.

**Nesting**— Hummingbirds build a very small, cup-shaped nest on the branches of trees and shrubs. The nest is made of plant down, very thin fibers, lichens, and spider webs. In May they lay 2 eggs, each smaller than a jellybean. The eggs hatch after about 15 to 17 days, and the young birds stay in the nest for 3 to 4 weeks.

**Colors**— The male rufous hummingbird has a green cap and is reddish-brown on its back, sides, and tail. It also has bright orange-red feathers on its throat that are brilliant when sunlight strikes them. The female has a greenish head and back, and much less reddish-brown on the rest of its body than the male.



## WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW

The white-crowned sparrow lives in many kinds of habitats, but it prefers open woodlands and brushy grasslands. It is also found along roads and in many kinds of neighborhoods. White-crowned sparrows are common in western Washington throughout the year, but they are most common in eastern Washington during the winter months.

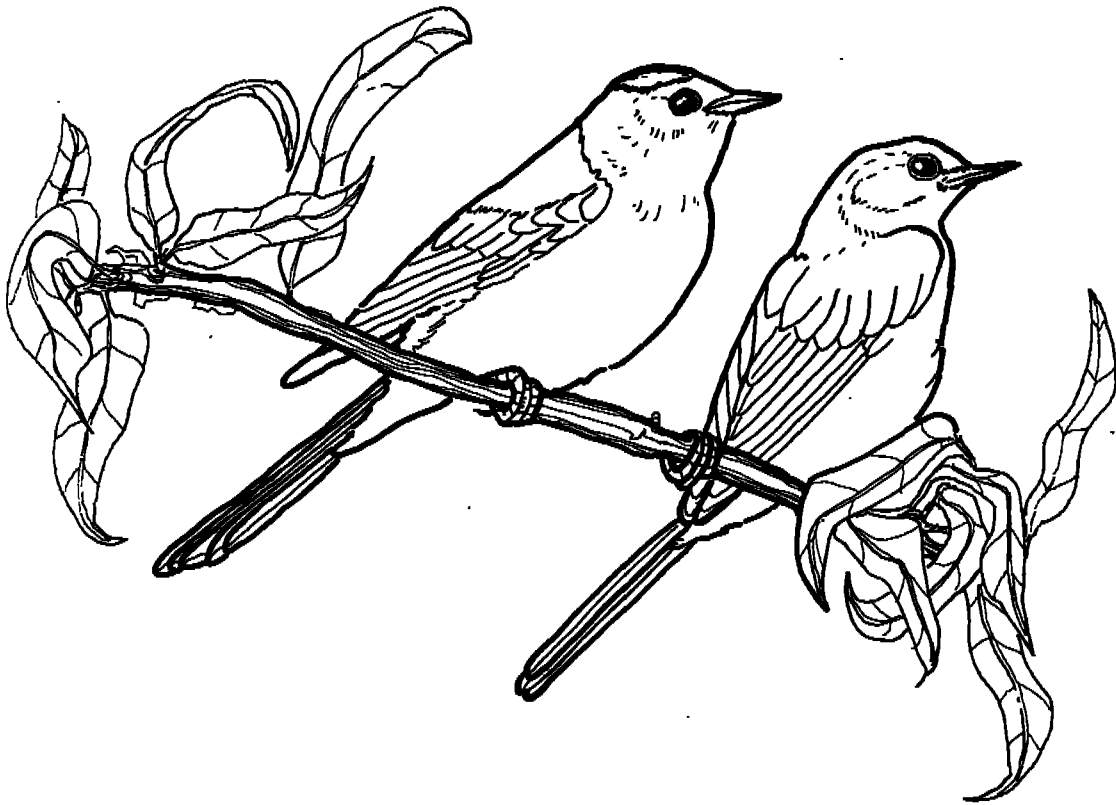
**Diet**— White-crowned sparrows eat seeds. They will come to a bird feeder, but they prefer to eat seeds that have been scattered on the ground. Millet is the best seed for them.

**Nesting**— Cats can be a problem for white-crowned sparrows because they eat and nest on the ground. The nest is hidden under low shrubs or in tall grasses. The nest is made of grass stems, small twigs, pine needles, and

moss. The female lays 2 to 5 eggs that are blue to greenish-blue with reddish-brown markings. The eggs are incubated for about 2 weeks, and the young birds leave the nest about 10 days after hatching.

The song of the white-crowned sparrow can be recognized by its whistled notes and twittering trills and buzzes. They sound somewhat like a song sparrow.

**Colors**— This bird is easy to recognize with its black-and-white striped head. Like other sparrows, the brownish back is darker than the belly. The **golden-crowned sparrow** is similar but has a yellow patch on top of its head. It is only found in western Washington during the winter months, often in flocks with white-crowned sparrows.



## WILSON'S WARBLER

Springtime is when the bright yellow birds appear in our neighborhoods in Washington State. Most live here only in the spring and summer. One of the brightest is the Wilson's warbler.

Most warblers don't like to live in cities and towns. They usually prefer forests and streamsides for their habitat. Even the Wilson's warbler is usually found in dense willow and alder thickets, bogs, and along streams. However, the Wilson's warbler is one that is likely to visit your yard during the spring and summer.

**Diet**— Warblers eat insects, so there must be lots of trees and shrubs for them to look for food. Neighborhoods with greenbelts and large parks are most likely to have enough insects for Wilson's warblers and other insect-eating birds.

**Nesting**— Cats are a problem for Wilson's warblers because they nest on or near the ground. The nest is a cup made of dead leaves, shreds of bark, and grass stems lined with small dry grasses and hair. It is placed at the base of shrubs or small trees or hidden in dry grass. In May or June the female usually lays 5 eggs that are incubated for about 12 days.

**Colors**— The Wilson's warbler has an olive back and bright yellow underside. The tail is dark on both sides. Males have a small black cap. Other warblers that you might see in your neighborhood are the **yellow-rumped warbler**, **common yellowthroat**, and **yellow warbler**.



# COUNTRY BIRDS

**The birds on pages 20-33 are usually seen in forests, fields, and other kinds of natural areas. Some may also be found in parks and backyards if they can find the right kind of habitat there.**

**Things to think about for country birds:**

- 1. Why do you think there are so many different kinds of birds living in parks, forests, and other natural areas?**

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- 2. If you could plan an imaginary neighborhood, what would you do to make it attractive to many different kinds of birds?**

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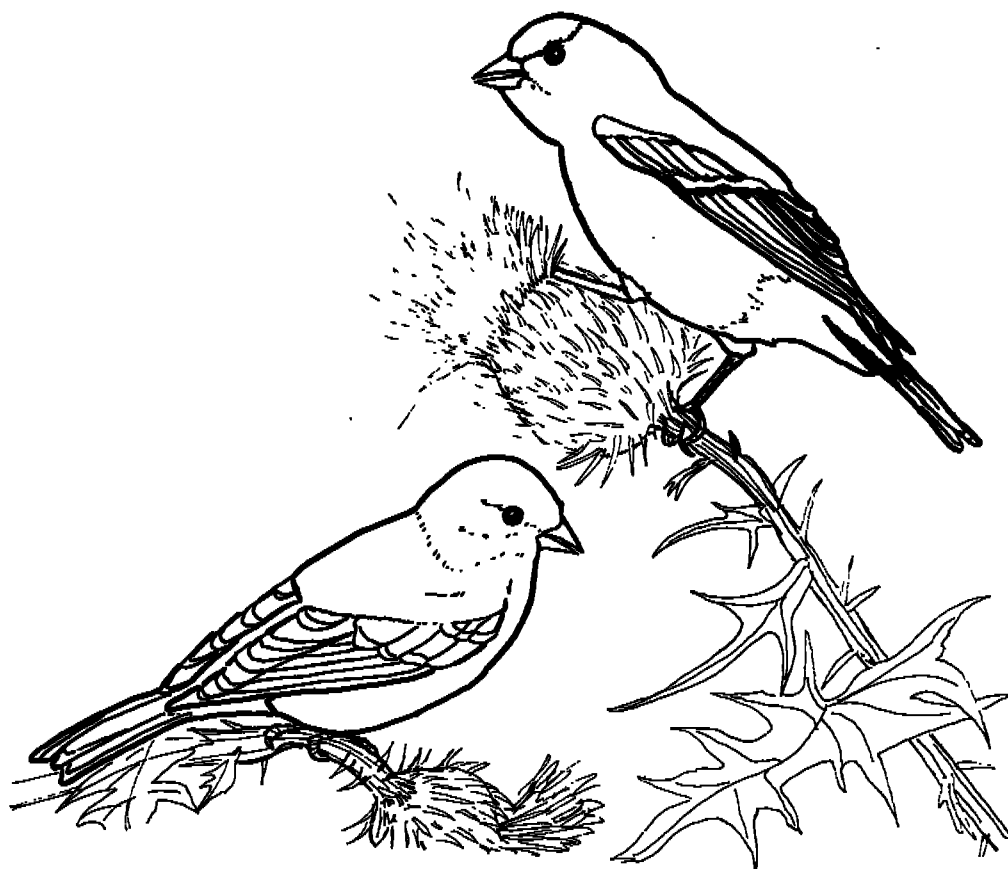
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- 3. What could you do to your own yard to make it more attractive to birds?**

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## AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

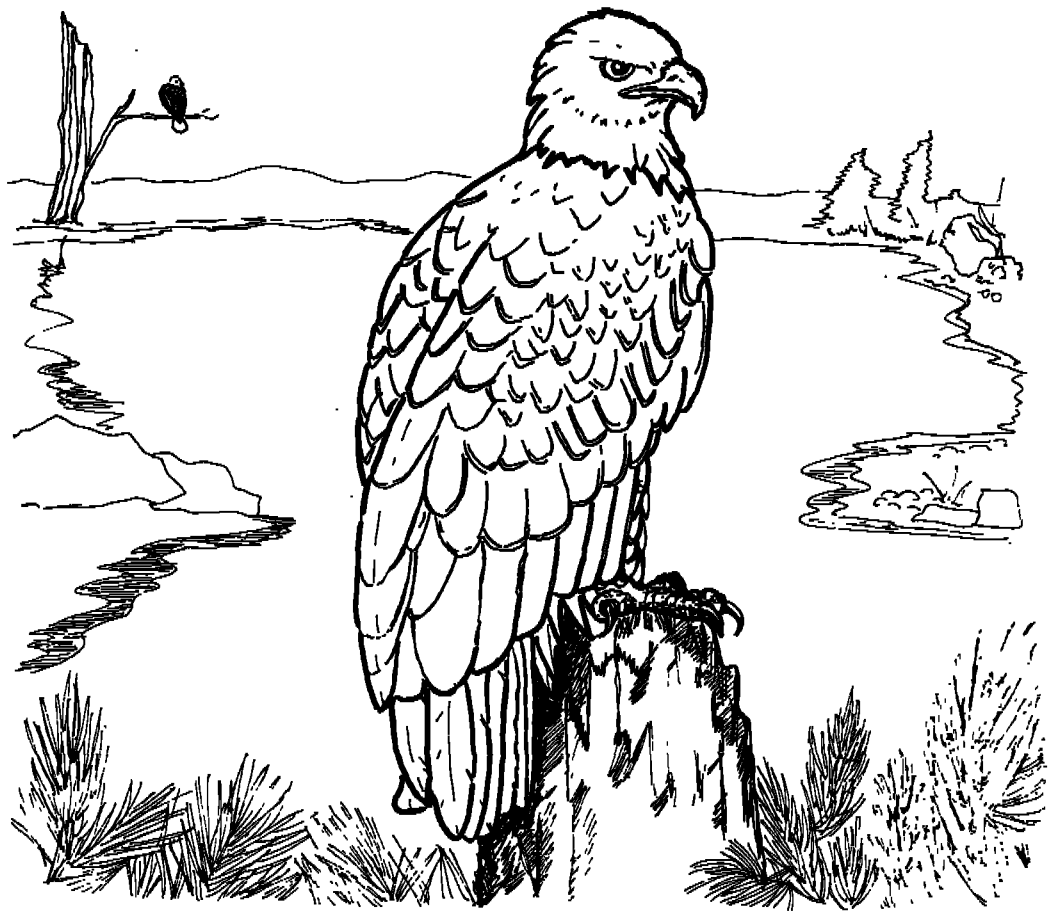
The American Goldfinch is our state bird. Some people call it a “wild canary”, although it isn’t really a canary. Goldfinches like to fly together in flocks, especially during the fall and winter. Their best habitat is weedy fields.

**Diet**— Goldfinches eat seeds. Their favorite seed is thistle, and they also like the seeds of tall grasses. If your yard has alder or birch, goldfinches may visit to eat the small seeds of those trees. Goldfinches might visit your birdfeeder, especially if you have thistle seed (also called niger). Goldfinches also like to eat the seeds of sunflowers, zinnias, and coreopsis.

**Nesting**— Goldfinches nest in low trees or shrubs. The nest is made of plant fibers and strips of bark and lined with plant down. The nest is

usually between 3 and 10 feet from the ground. The female lays 5 pale blue eggs in May. The eggs take about a week to hatch, and the young birds stay in the nest for another 2 weeks.

**Colors**— The American Goldfinch has such vivid yellow and black coloring that it is easy to spot even at a distance. In the spring, the male is mostly bright yellow, but he has a black forehead and cap, black wings, and a black tail. There are narrow bars of white on the wings. The female is brownish olive above and paler yellow below. During the winter, the male loses the black on his head, and both male and female lose their bright yellow color and become more brownish.



## BALD EAGLE

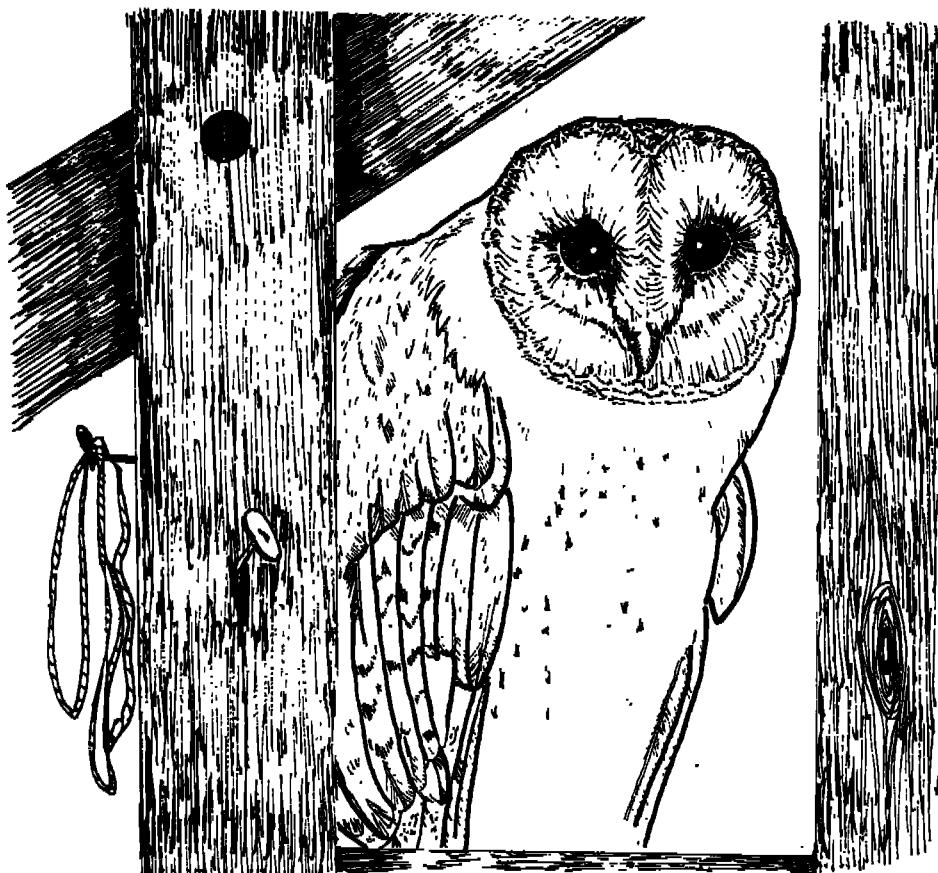
The Bald Eagle is the symbol of our country. It is a strong, majestic bird that rules the skies over its territory. This is why the founding fathers of our country chose the eagle to represent us. However, Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey instead of the eagle for our symbol. He thought that eagles weren't really so majestic when they ate dead fish and garbage!

Eagles are *endangered* in most areas of the United States. Eagles have been shot by some people. Much eagle habitat has been destroyed by logging and the building of cities and towns. Eagle habitat has also been poisoned by chemicals like DDT. If this had continued, all of the eagles could have died and they would have become *extinct*. Washington now has new laws to help the Department of Wildlife protect the Bald Eagle. Its numbers are now increasing in this state.

**Diet**— The eagle's favorite food is fish, especially salmon that have died after spawning. One of the best places to see eagles is along the Skagit River during the winter where they gather to eat the dying salmon.

**Nesting**— Bald Eagles build a large nest near the top of a tall tree. They return to the same nest year after year. Eagles usually raise one or two chicks during the spring and early summer. There are around 250 eagle nests in Washington. A few nests are even in some of our cities like Everett, Edmonds, and Seattle.

**Colors**— The Bald Eagle isn't really bald, but its white head may make it look that way. The tail is also white. Young eagles are all brown, and they don't get the white head and tail until they are about three years old.



## BARN OWL

The barn owl has a heart-shaped face that looks like a monkey to some people and like a ghost to others. True to their name, barn owls like to live in barns. They will nest in other kinds of buildings, too, as well as tree cavities, crevices in rocks, on cliffs, and other places with an enclosed space. Their favorite habitat is woodlands along streams, sagebrush deserts, and rural areas where people live. The barn owl is nocturnal, which means it is active at night.

**Diet**— The barn owl is the farmers' friend because it is so good at catching mice. When it catches a mouse, it swallows the whole animal. The fur and bones that can't be digested are coughed up as a pellet. These gray pellets are one to two inches long. They often collect under a tree or by a rock where the owl likes to eat its

meals. Look for these pellets where owls roost. If you find a pellet, take it apart to find the bones of the owl's prey.

**Nesting**— Barn owls lay 4 to 7 white eggs that are incubated for one month. Young birds stay in the nest for another two months.

**Colors**— Barn owls are rusty-brown with white spots on the upperside. They are usually white with brownish spots on the underside. Other owls that often live in greenbelts and large parks are **screech owls** and **great horned owls**.



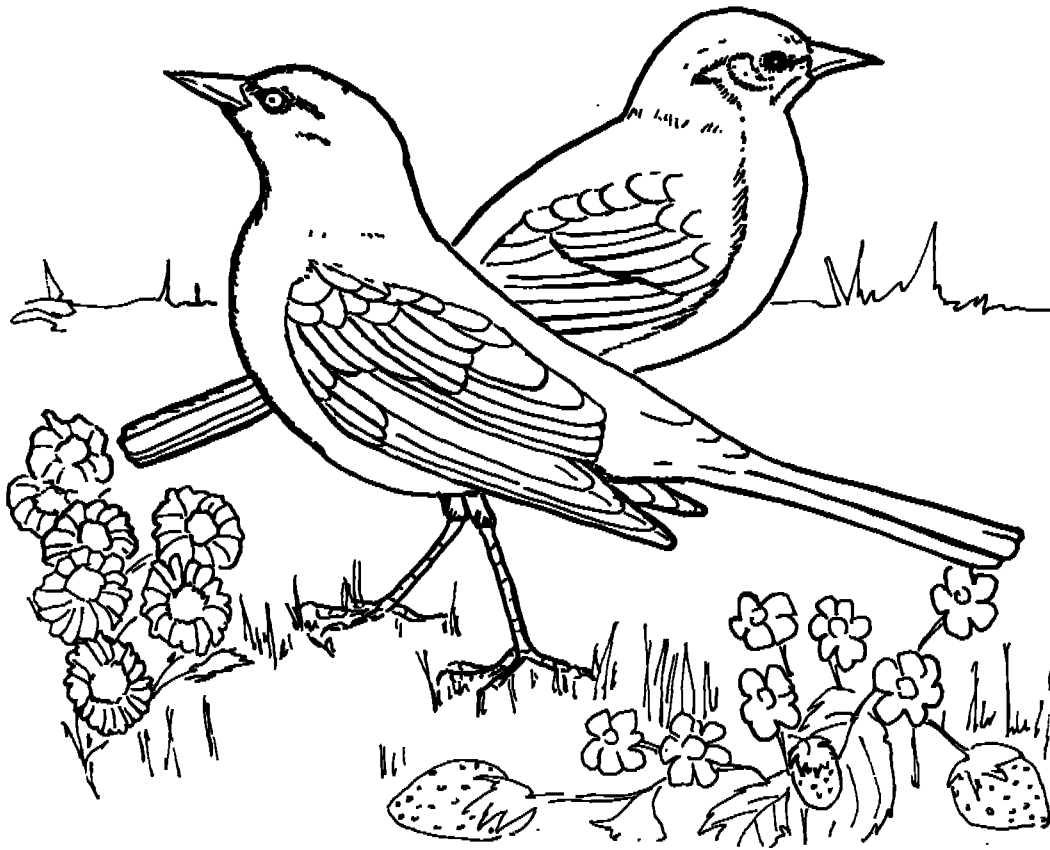
## BEWICK'S WREN

The most common wren in neighborhoods of western Washington is the Bewick's wren; they do not live in eastern Washington. It is usually found in areas with lots of shrubby thickets. Greenbelts, natural parks, and undeveloped ravines provide good habitat for Bewick's wrens. Unlike the house wren, the Bewick's wren stays here throughout the year and does not migrate.

**Diet**— The favorite food of the Bewick's wren is insects. They look for food on or near the ground.

**Nesting**— Bewick's wrens nest in cavities that they find in trees, rock walls, dirt banks, and bird houses. If you make a bird house for them, it should be placed in a well-concealed location. Female wrens lay 5 to 7 eggs that are incubated for about 2 weeks.

**Colors**— The Bewick's wren is grayish-brown above and pale below. It has a white stripe over the eye. This stripe makes it easy to tell apart from the **winter wren** and **house wren**. The **marsh wren** also has an eye stripe, but it also has white streaks on its back and it lives in a very different kind of habitat - marshes and other wetlands.



## BREWER'S BLACKBIRD

The Brewer's blackbird likes dry land compared to the red-winged blackbird of wetlands. It's favorite habitat is open areas, especially farms and golf courses. It often flocks with red-winged blackbirds and starlings. When they sit on a wire with starlings, you can see that Brewer's blackbirds have much longer tails. They walk with a jerking motion of their head.

**Diet**— Brewer's blackbirds eat mostly corn, grain, and seeds of weeds. They often swarm in large numbers over agricultural fields looking for spilled seeds. You might also see Brewer's blackbirds on the side of the road eating weed seeds and getting grit.

**Nesting**— These blackbirds place their nest in trees and shrubs, especially near ponds or streams. The nest

is made of twigs and grasses, mud mixed with grasses and pine needles, and lined with hairs and soft parts of plants. The female lays 5 to 6 eggs in May that are incubated for nearly 2 weeks. The young leave the nest after 12 days.

**Colors**— Male Brewer's blackbirds have a shiny black color with a purplish gloss on the head and a greenish gloss on the body and wings. The eye of males is yellowish-white. The female is brown with a dark eye.



## CALIFORNIA QUAIL

California quail are easy to spot when they form large flocks made of several families of adults and young birds. Their favorite habitat is brushy areas along streams, shrubby thickets, and large greenbelts. Your neighborhood may have California quail if there are undeveloped areas nearby.

California quail spend most of their time on the ground. Whenever there is danger nearby, they run as fast as their short legs will carry them. When they fly, they travel only for a short distance. Because they spend so much time on the ground, California quail need brush and other cover for shelter.

**Diet**— California quail like to eat seeds, fruits, and insects. You can feed them during the winter with seeds, especially millet, scattered in open areas on the ground.

**Nesting**— Quail build their nests in brush piles, under shrubs or logs, or next to rocks. Pet cats can be very dangerous to birds like this that nest on the ground. The female lays 12 to 17 eggs that are incubated for about 3 weeks. Young quail can run around soon after hatching, so they don't spend very much time in the nest.

California quail can be heard from far away. Their call is a loud "Chi-CAW- go, Chi-CAW-go".

**Colors**— California quail are easy to identify because of a plume of feathers on the top of their head. The male's plume is longer, and the male is more bluish-gray than the brownish female. The male has a black throat, white chin stripe, and gray breast. Some of its neck and belly feathers look like scales because of their black edges.



## NORTHERN FLICKER

The flicker's habitat is open woodlands and large parks. It can be found in neighborhoods with large trees, especially during the winter. Flickers have a very loud call that sounds like a rapid "*wik-wik-wik-wik*" or "*wick-er, wick-er, wick-er*". They also call with a single, loud "*klee-yer*".

**Diet**— The flicker is a woodpecker that likes to eat on the ground. Its favorite food is ants. It also looks for insects in the bark and crevices of a tree trunk. When it is on the trunk of a tree, watch how it uses its tail to hold its body upright. Flickers will sometimes come to a feeder with suet.

**Nesting**— Flickers make a cavity in a tree for their nest. Both the male and female work for 2 to 4 weeks to make the cavity. They lay 6 to 8 eggs, and the eggs take about 12 days to

hatch. Young flickers stay in the nest for nearly one month. The cavities that flickers make are later used by other cavity-nesting birds like chickadees and wrens. Sometimes a flicker will use a nest box if the entrance hole is large enough. Because flickers like to make their own cavity, some people first pack the nest box with wood chips and then let the flicker pull the chips out.

**Colors**— When flickers fly, you can see the reddish color under the wings and its white rump patch. They have a brown barred back, spotted belly, and a black bib. The male flicker has a red moustache.



## MOURNING DOVE

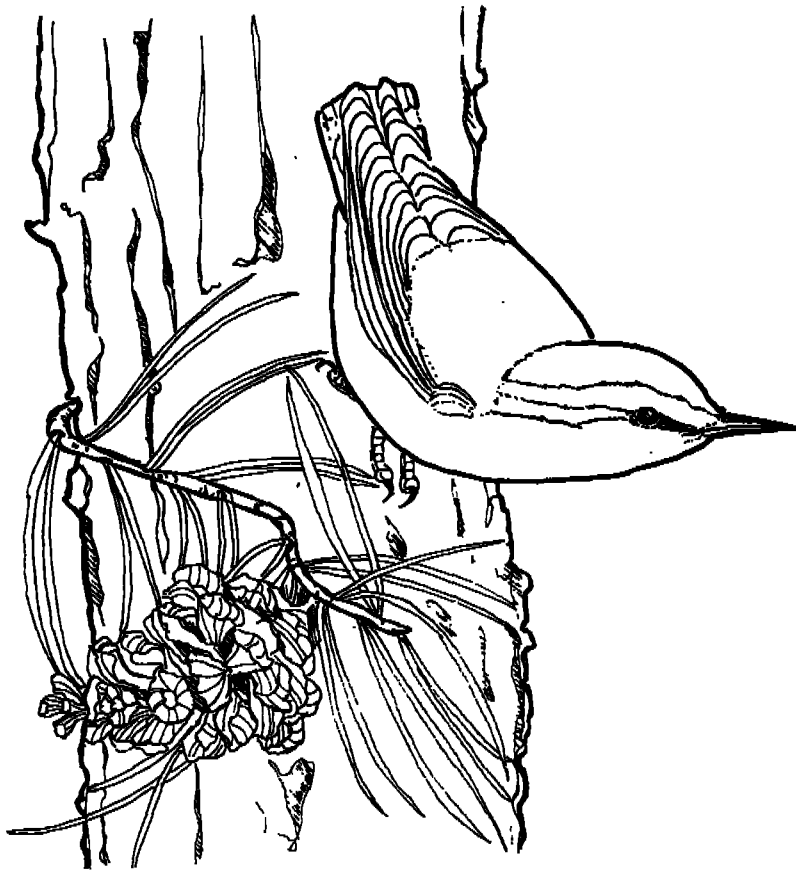
Mourning doves get their name from their calls which sound like a sad *oo-woo-woo-woo-woo*. They are much more common in eastern Washington than west of the Cascades. Some migrate south during the winter, so they are most numerous during the summer months. The habitat of the mourning dove is open areas, especially around farms and along rural roads.

**Diet**— Mourning doves like to feed on grain and other seeds. They will come into neighborhoods to eat seeds that people provide, especially if the seeds are thrown on the ground in open areas.

**Nesting**— Most mourning doves nest in a tree or shrub. They often use the old nest of some other kind of bird. Those that make their own nest just

make a platform of twigs. The female lays just 2 white eggs that are incubated for about 2 weeks. The young birds stay in the nest for another 2 weeks.

**Colors**— Mourning doves are tan colored with the backside darker than the underside. They have black spots on the wing, a small black spot under the eye, and some faint green and purple gloss on the neck and throat. Mourning doves are slimmer and have a longer tail than pigeons. They are often seen sitting in a quiet group in a tree or on a wire. When they fly away their wings make a fluttering whistle sound (pigeon wings make a flapping sound).



## RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

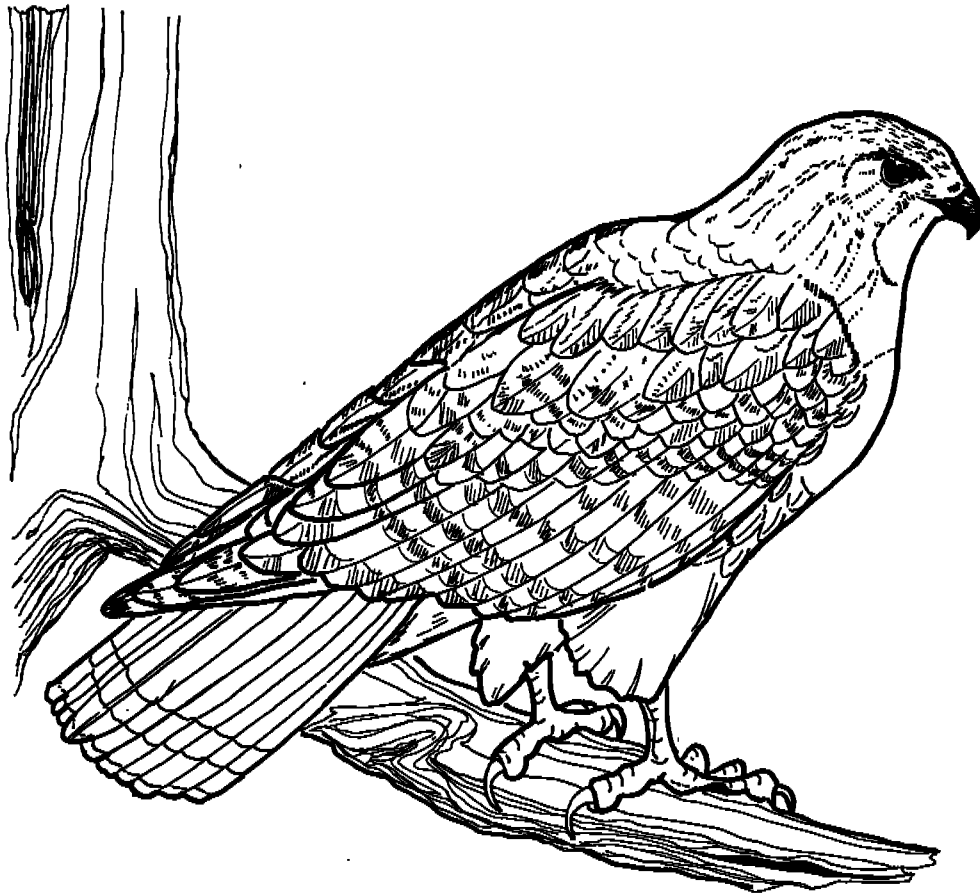
The nuthatch is a tiny bird with a big voice. Its nasal-sounding “*aaank*, *aaank*”, like a toy tin horn, can often be heard before the nuthatch is seen. The habitat of the red-breasted nuthatch is the evergreen forest. Nuthatches might be in your neighborhood if there are many tall trees present. It often forms flocks with chickadees, bushtits, and kinglets.

**Diet**— Nuthatches eat insects. They look for insects in cracks in the bark of the trunk and branches of trees. They use their long bill as a probe and tweezers to pick out insects. In the winter they also eat seeds. They sometimes will come to a bird feeder, especially if it has suet.

**Nesting**— Red-breasted nuthatches nest in tree cavities. They usually use old woodpecker holes. If the wood is

soft enough, nuthatches can make their own cavity. Nuthatches have the habit of smearing tree sap around the entrance of their cavity. Biologists aren't sure why nuthatches do this; what explanation can you make? Nuthatches lay 5 to 6 eggs that are incubated for about 12 days. The young birds leave the nest about 3 weeks after hatching. Nuthatches may use a bird house, although they prefer natural cavities.

**Colors**— The nuthatch has a black cap and a black line through the eye, a white eyebrow, dark gray back, and rusty red underside. The female has duller colors. Both have short tails and short, pointed bills.



## RED-TAILED HAWK

The red-tailed hawk is often seen along the road sitting majestically on fence posts or in trees or soaring in wide circles overhead. The best habitat for red-tailed hawks is woodlands with open space nearby. Their call is a loud "kleeeer" that goes down in pitch.

**Diet**—Red-tailed hawks look for food while soaring or while sitting in a tree or on some other lookout. They often sit on light poles over freeways looking for food in the grassy areas below. They eat mice, squirrels, and other small rodents.

**Nesting**—Red-tailed hawks usually nest in trees, and nests may be used year after year. They will also place their nest on a rocky ledge if there aren't any trees nearby. The nest is made of twigs and lined with softer stems and bark. They lay 1 to 3 eggs

which hatch about one month later. The young stay in the nest for 6 to 7 weeks.

**Colors**—Red-tailed hawks have a dark head, light chest, and a dark band across the belly, but there are differences in the amounts of light and dark coloration among individual hawks. Their back is dark brown. The upper side of the hawk's tail is brick-red. Young birds don't get a red tail until they are two years old.

Hawks and eagles used to be shot by many people because of fears that they killed chickens, lambs, and other farm animals. Unfortunately, these fears sometimes remain today, even in people who live in cities. It is against the law to shoot hawks and other birds of prey.



## RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEE

The rufous-sided towhee is an independent bird - it lives by itself or with its mate and never occurs in large flocks with other towhees. Often it flocks with a few other birds like song sparrows and juncos. Towhees live on both sides of the Cascades, but most migrate from eastern Washington during the winter. Towhee habitat consists of areas with dense shrubs, especially at edges of woodlands.

**Diet**— Towhees look for insects and seeds on the ground by kicking fallen leaves backwards with both feet. You can feed towhees by scattering millet on bare areas of the ground.

**Nesting**— Towhees nest on the ground. Their nest is a cup of grasses, shreds of bark, and dead leaves lined with hair and small grasses. The cup is placed in a small depression so that

the rim is at the level of the ground. In late April or early May the female lays 3 to 4 eggs that are incubated for nearly 2 weeks. The young birds leave the nest about 9 days after hatching.

Cats can be a danger to towhees because these birds spend so much time on the ground. They fly higher up in trees in the spring when the males want to sing. The song is a metallic-sounding trill that sounds like *tw-eeeeee*. Their call given to other birds in the shrubby thickets sounds somewhat like a cat's meow that slowly rises in pitch - *hreeeeee*.

**Colors**— Towhees have a black hood and back, chestnut sides, and white underparts. There are white spots on the wings, and the corners of the tail are also white. The black on the female is not as dark as the male. Towhees have red eyes.



## SONG SPARROW

The song sparrow really lives up to its name. Its beautiful song blends with the bright sounds of the house finch and wren to brighten our spring days.

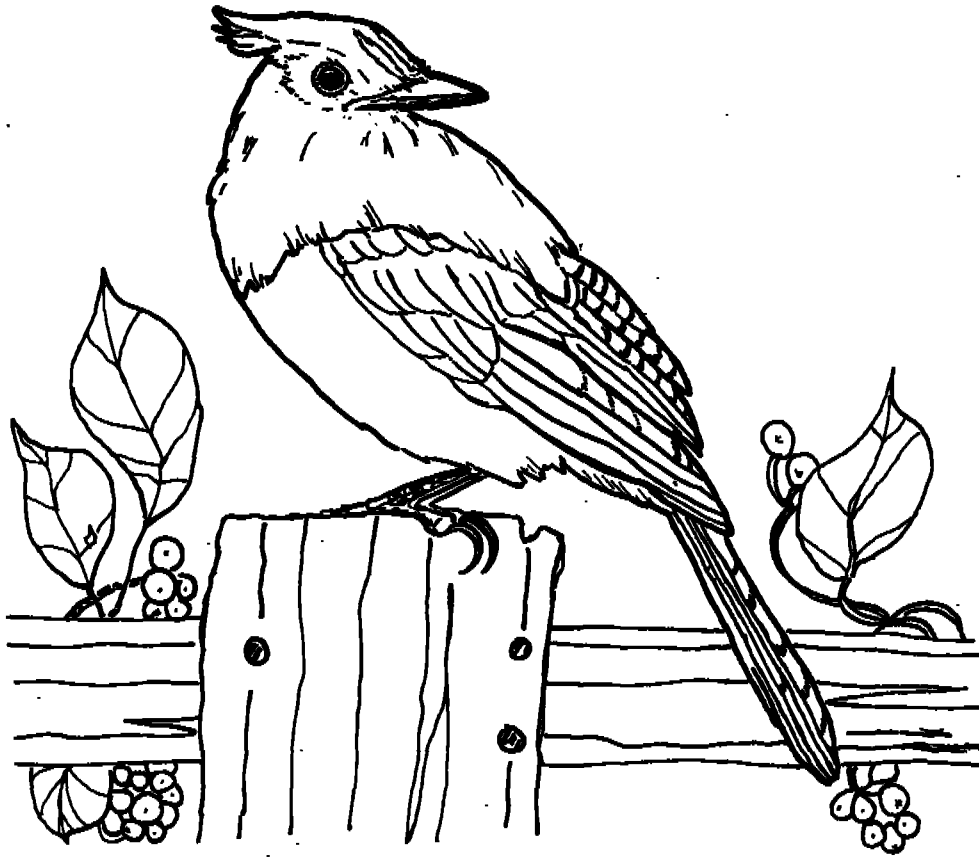
Song sparrows find their habitat in low tangles of dense shrubs. They are especially common in blackberry thickets at the edge of a field and along streams and wetlands.

**Diet**— Song sparrows eat insects and seeds that they find on the ground. They "pump" their tail while flying close to the ground from shrub to shrub. Cats are dangerous to song sparrows because the birds spend so much time on the ground.

**Nesting**— The song sparrow hides its nest on the ground under a bush or in a brush pile. Sometimes the nest will be built in a low shrub or tree.

The cup-shaped nest is made of grasses, leaves, and bark fibers, and it is lined with soft grass and hair. In April or May song sparrows lay 3 to 5 eggs that are incubated for about 2 weeks. The young birds stay in the nest for 2 more weeks.

**Colors**— Song sparrows are mostly brown, with the back darker than the belly. They have streaks of brown and gray on their head. Their whitish chin, breast, and sides are also streaked with brown.



## STELLER'S JAY

Many people call this bird a "blue jay", but its real name is the Steller's jay. The blue jay is another bird that lives in the central and eastern part of the United States.

Steller's jays find their habitat in wooded areas. They are common in campgrounds where they steal food from picnic tables. That is how they get their nickname of "camp robber".

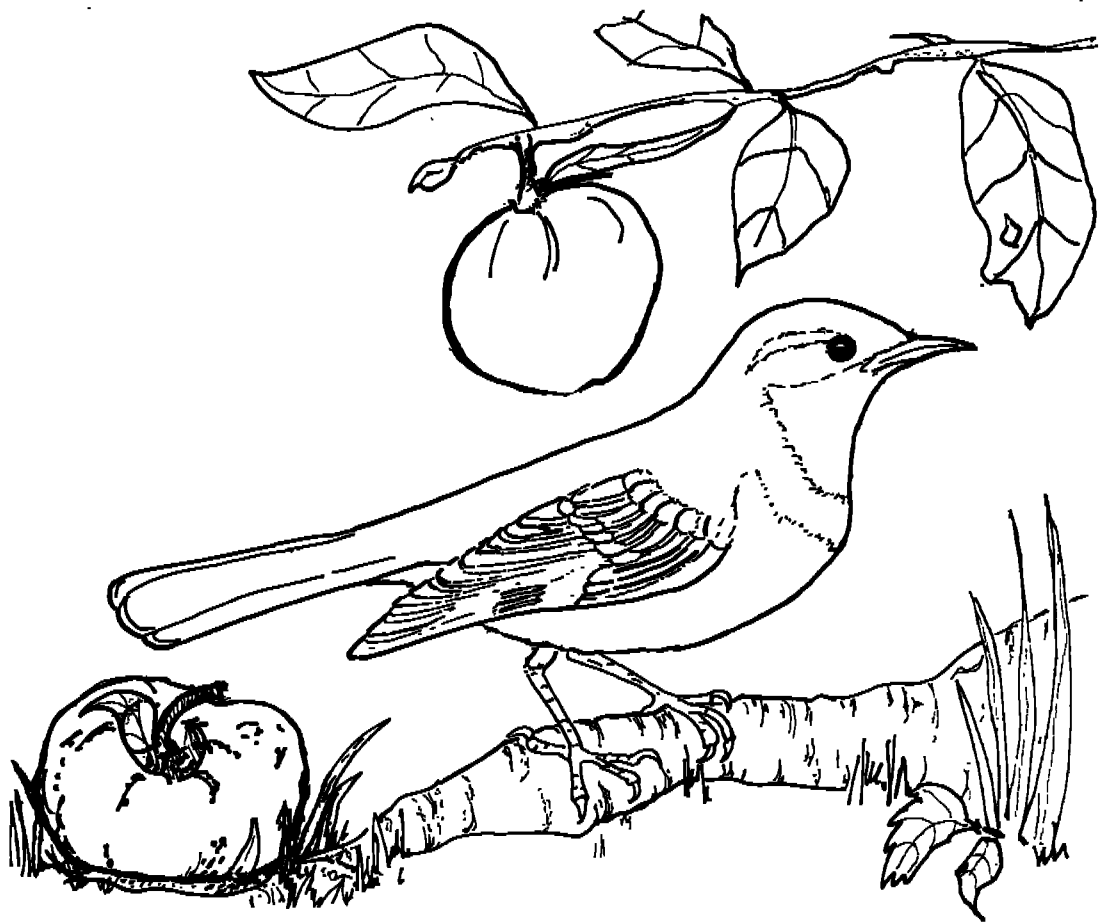
**Diet**— The Steller's jay eats insects and seeds. They will come to feeders to eat suet, peanuts, and dog food. Steller's jays may also eat the eggs and young of other birds. They often drive away these smaller songbirds.

**Nesting**— The jay's nest is usually placed in a tree. They make a cup of twigs, leaves, and mud with a lining of hair, grasses, and needles. In April or May Steller's jays usually lay 4 eggs

that are incubated for around 16 days.

**Colors**— It is easy to recognize the Steller's jay. It is dark blue with a black head, throat, and upper breast. It has a crest of feathers on its head. Their call is a harsh *shaack shaack shaack*.

The **scrub jay** is found in southwest Washington. It has a blue head, wings, and tail, but the head does not have a crest. The breast and a patch on the back are grayish. Scrub jays are often seen on the ground. The **gray jay** is found in the mountains at high elevations. They often occur in quiet flocks. Gray jays are mostly gray, with the backside darker than the underside. Another relative, the **Clark's nutcracker**, is also found at high elevations. It is gray with black wings. Their call is a loud *kra-a-a*.



## VARIED THRUSH

Some people call the varied thrush an "Alaska robin" because it looks somewhat like a robin with a black stripe across its breast. The favorite habitat of the varied thrush is dense evergreen forests. It may also be found in woodlands along streams and rivers. It is found in neighborhoods most often during the winter, especially when heavy snowfall makes food hard to find.

**Diet**— The varied thrush eats insects, worms, seeds, and fruits; they especially like apples. If varied thrushes are around your home during the winter, they can be fed millet and apples placed in open areas on the ground.

**Nesting**— The nest of the varied thrush is a large cup usually placed 6 to 20 feet up in a small evergreen tree

in a moist forest. The nest is made of twigs, dead leaves, shreds of bark, and grass stems. It is lined with small grasses. The female lays 3 blue eggs in April or early May.

The song of the varied thrush is a soft series of notes at different pitches. Each note is sung for about one second with a longer pause between notes. They like to sing in gloomy weather, especially after rainfalls. Hearing them can help make a dreary day seem brighter!

**Colors**— The male thrush has a grayish-blue back, broad black stripe through its eye, an orange eyebrow, orange underside with a black band across the breast, and two orange bars on its wing. The female is not as brightly marked, with a brownish back and much fainter breast band.



# **WATER BIRDS**

**The birds on pages 36-42 are usually found in or near water. Their habitat may be bays, lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, or wetlands.**

**Things to think about for water birds:**

- 1. What do you think can happen to wetlands in urban areas that would cause the wildlife living there to disappear?**

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- 2. Some birds that live on lakes and ponds, such as mallards and coots, increase in numbers as people move in. What habitat changes do you think allow more of these birds to live in an area where there are many people?**

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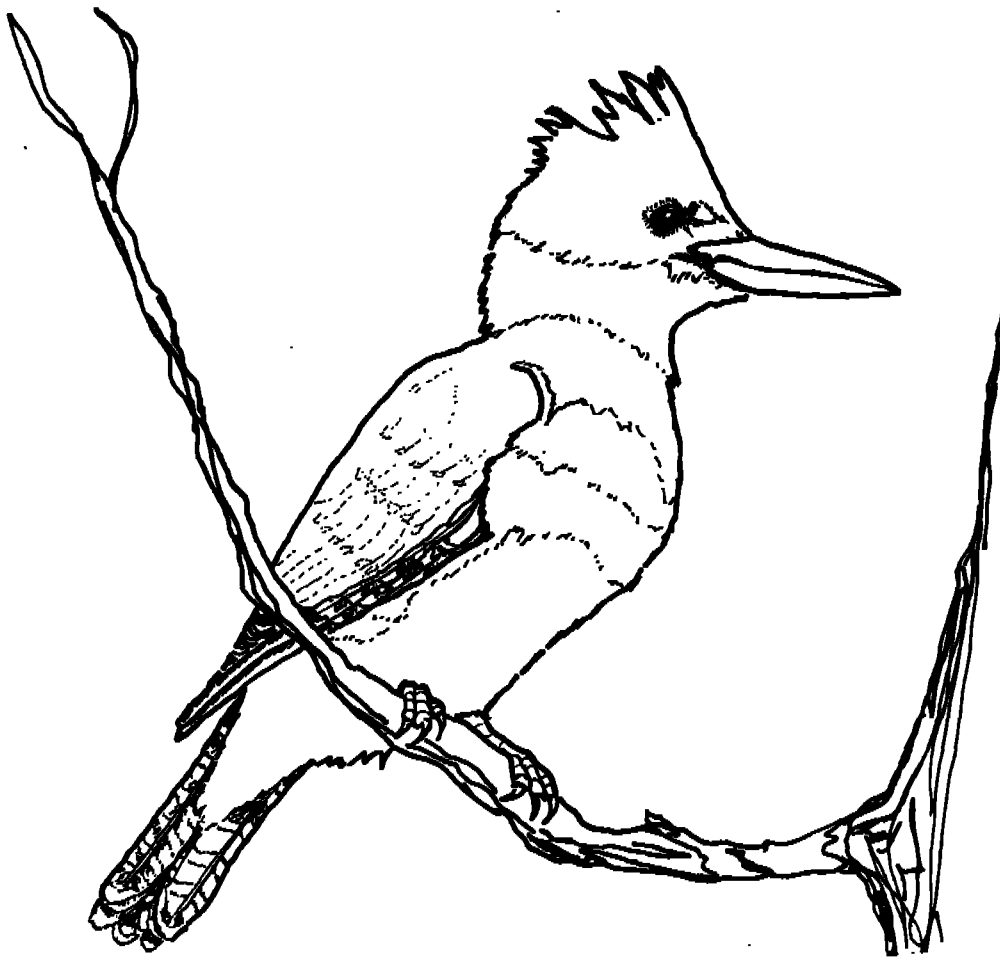
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- 3. Why do you think there are more birds like coots and fewer birds like herons around ponds where many people live?**

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## BELTED KINGFISHER

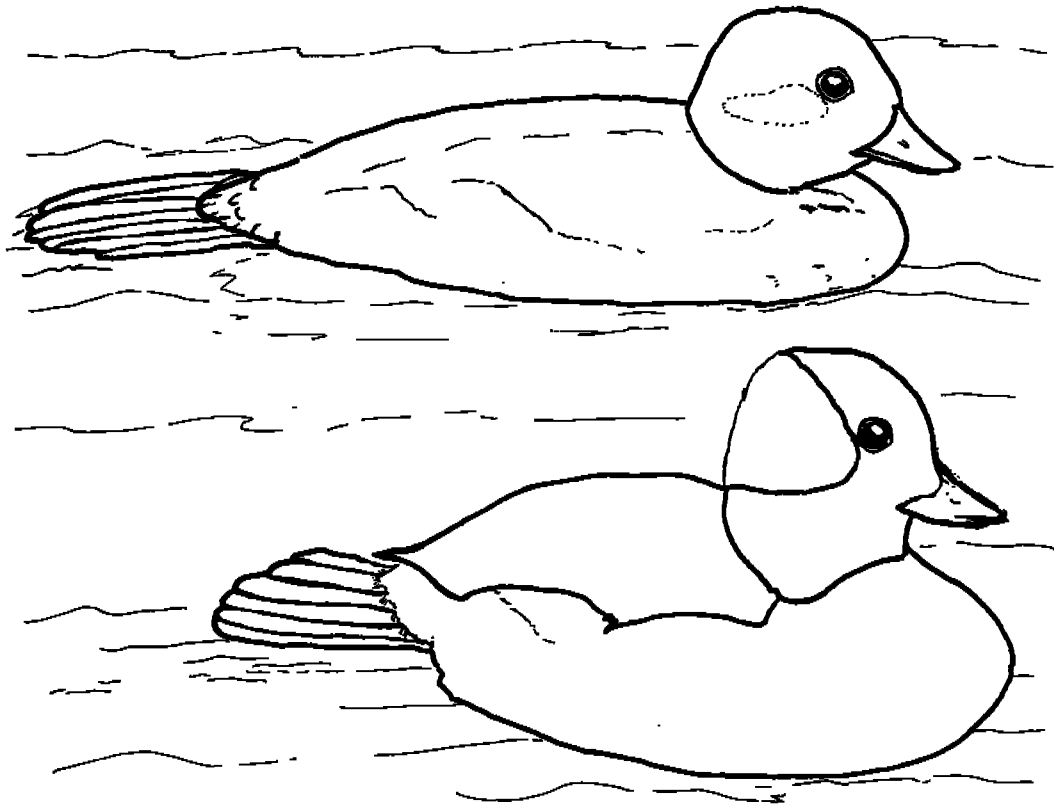
Kingfishers are always found around water. Their habitat includes rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and saltwater shorelines. Kingfishers often give a loud, rattling call. They are usually seen alone or in pairs.

**Diet**— Kingfishers eat fish. They look for fish while perched overhead in a tree or on a wire. They can also hover above the water before diving headfirst for their food.

**Nesting**— A kingfisher uses its bill and feet to dig a burrow into the side of a stream bank for its nest. The burrow is usually 3 to 6 feet long, although some may dig for 15 feet. In April or May they lay 6 to 8 round, white eggs. After hatching, the young stay in the burrow for about one month. Whenever an adult brings a small fish to the nest, it gives the fish

headfirst to its young so that it can be swallowed more easily. By the time the young are ready to leave, the burrow has become very messy with bird droppings and fish bones.

**Colors**— Kingfishers have large heads with a crest of feathers. They have a blue head, back, tail, and wings. The belly is white with a blue band across the chest. The female also has a rusty brown band across its belly and onto its sides.



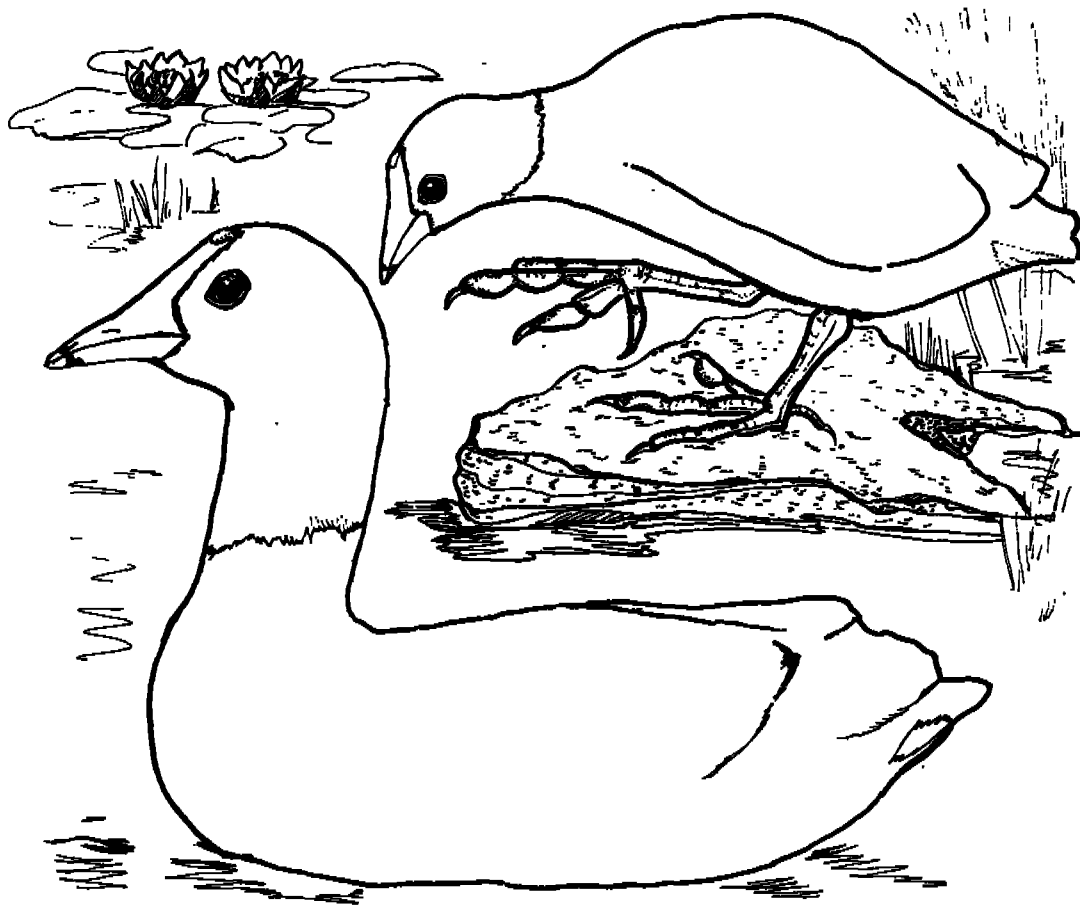
## **BUFFLEHEAD**

Any small, white-and-black duck that you see swimming in water near your neighborhood is often a bufflehead. Buffleheads are small ducks, but the white body and head of the male make it very easy to spot even when it is swimming far away. Buffleheads are found in Washington only during the fall and winter months. They can be found in both saltwater and freshwater lakes and ponds. They usually are alone or in small groups.

**Diet**— Buffleheads dive underwater to find food. They eat insects, crayfish, and other small animals.

**Nesting**— Buffleheads migrate north in the spring to Canada and Alaska to lay their eggs and raise their young. They nest in tree cavities, usually in holes made by woodpeckers.

**Colors**— The male bufflehead has a white body except for a blackish back and head. The head also has a large, white patch above and behind the eye. The female is more brownish, and its head is darker than its body. It has a white, oval patch under the eye. Both the male and female have small bills.



## AMERICAN COOT

Coots act like ducks, but they are really very different. Coots are usually seen swimming on lakes, ponds, and in marshes. They can also be found in the saltwater of Puget Sound. Unlike ducks, coots don't have webbing between their toes for swimming. Instead, each long toe has a flap of skin on each side. These flat "lobes" push against the water and help the coot to swim. Look for these lobes when a coot is standing on a log or on the ground. When a coot wants to fly, it must first "run" across the water until it has enough speed to lift it into the air.

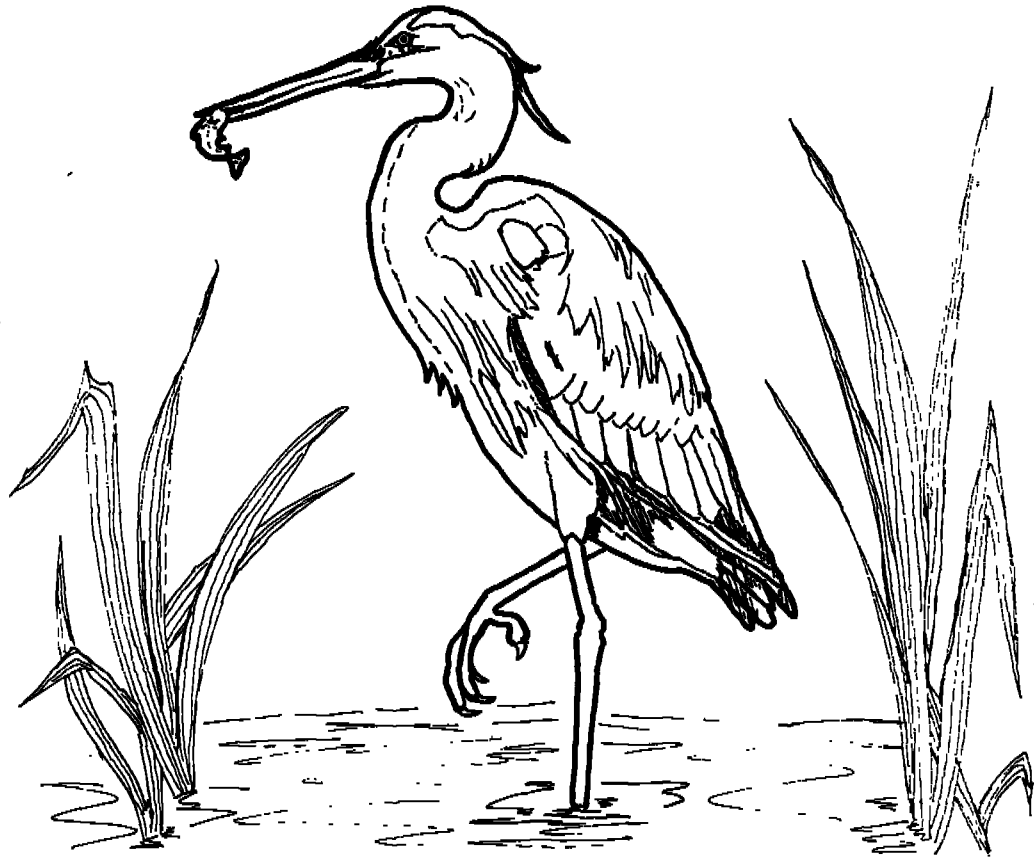
Another difference between ducks and coots is that coots don't have a broad, flat bill. Their bill is more like that of a chicken, and some people call coots "mud hens".

**Diet**—Coots eat underwater plants,

algae, and grasses. Sometimes they gather on playfields or golf courses to eat grass. These large flocks can make a mess and create problems for people.

**Nesting**—Coots make a nest out of dead leaves and stems of water plants. The nest is often on the ground in a marsh or along the bank of a pond. Sometimes the nest is placed in branches that droop down close to the water. Coots usually lay 6 to 9 eggs. The young are brightly colored with red, orange, yellow, and black. They can swim shortly after hatching.

**Colors**—Coots have a grayish-black body, dark head, yellowish legs, and a white bill with a dark band near the tip. Their eye is red, and they have a small reddish-brown spot on their forehead. There is a white patch on their wing that is seen when they fly.



## GREAT-BLUE HERON

The great blue heron is as tall as an eight-year old child, and its wings reach out so far that a six-year old could stretch out on each wing. It has long legs and a long, slender neck and bill. When it flies, it folds its neck into an "S"-shaped curve and flaps its wings with a slow, steady beat.

The herons favorite habitat is along the banks of bays, marshes, ponds, rivers, and other wetlands. It can also be seen in pastures and fields.

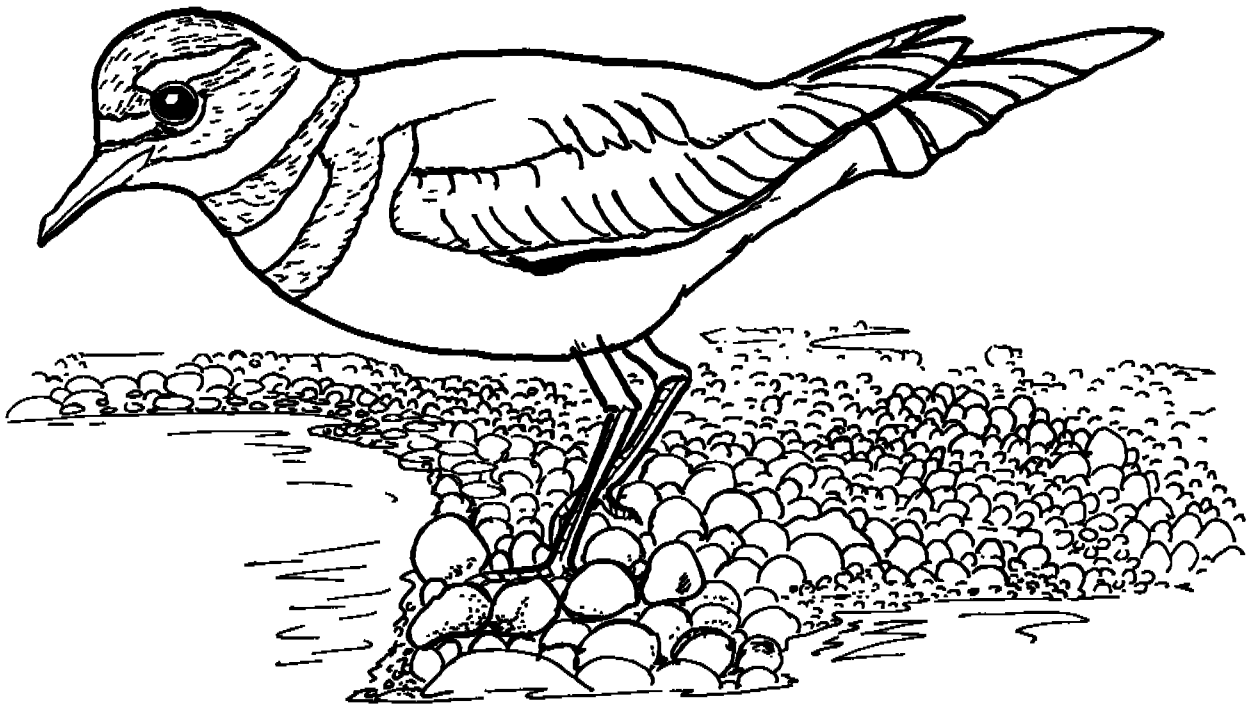
**Diet**— Herons eat fish, frogs, mice, insects, and other small animals.

**Nesting**— Herons nest together in a "rookery". The nests are built in tall trees such as alder, cottonwood, or Douglas fir. If there are no trees around, the herons will place the nest on a rocky ledge or on the ground in reed beds. Sometimes there are more

than 100 nests in a rookery. The herons build the nest with twigs, and nests may be used year after year. They usually lay 4 eggs that take about a month to hatch. Young birds stay in the nest for 2 months before they learn to fly.

Herons are very sensitive and easily disturbed by people. When the adult birds are forced to leave the nest, the eggs and young birds may die from the cold. Crows and gulls are also able to sneak in and eat an egg or young bird. Rookeries are also threatened when trees are cut to make room for houses.

**Colors**— Herons are gray-blue with some black on their head and neck. The adults have long feathers called plumes on their head, neck, and back during the spring and summer.



## KILLDEER

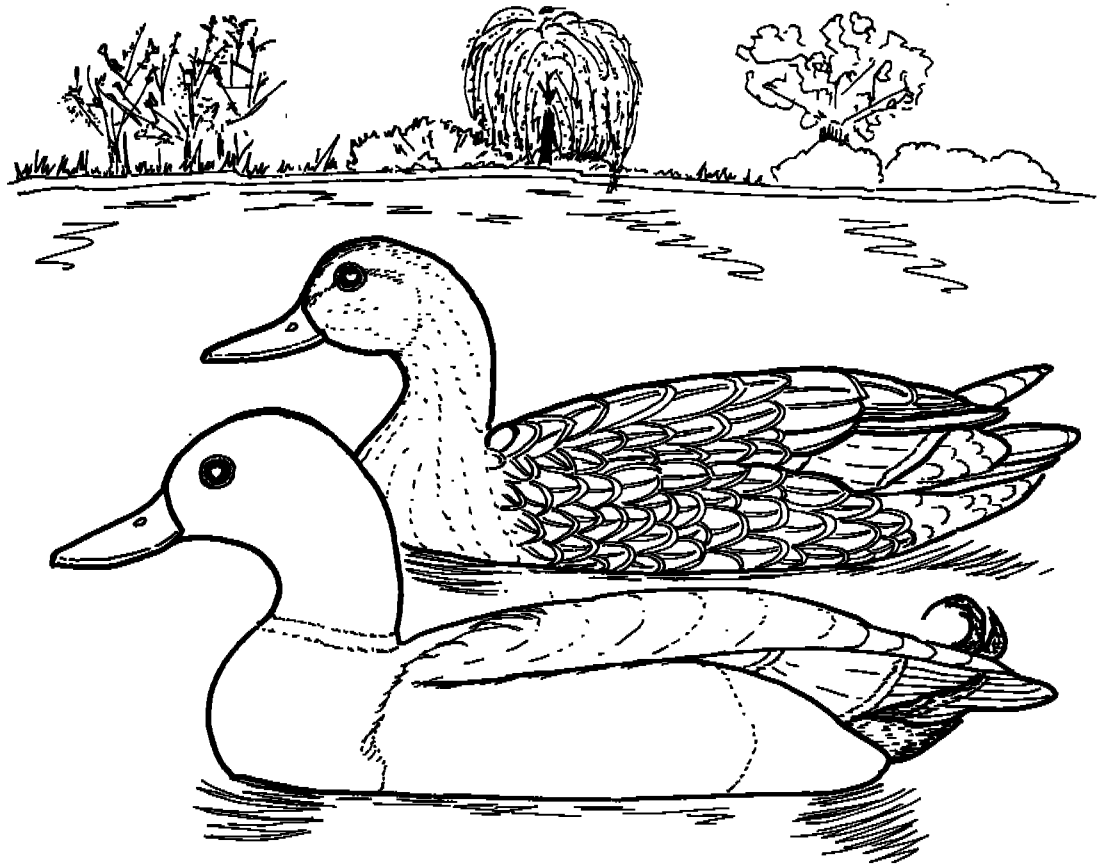
The killdeer is a shorebird, although it is often found far from any shores. Its habitat is wetlands, meadows, farm fields, airfields, and along the shores of rivers and saltwater. Killdeer spend much time on the ground. Their long legs give them plenty of speed when they run. When they run or fly, they often call their name with a loud "kill-dee, kill-dee, dee-dee-dee".

**Diet**— Killdeer eat insects they find on the ground.

**Nesting**— Killdeer nest on the ground. They don't really make a nest. They simply lay their eggs in a small depression in a gravelly or sandy area. Their 4 eggs are spotted and speckled so that they blend in very well with the ground. Sometimes a killdeer might lay its eggs on a gravel roof of a building.

If a predator like a coyote comes too close to the nest, the adult killdeer will call loudly and pretend that it has a broken wing. The predator will think that the adult is injured and easy to catch. The killdeer will lure the predator away from the nest, always staying ahead of the predator so that it doesn't get caught. Young killdeer can run soon after hatching; this gives them a chance to escape from predators like snakes and skunks.

**Colors**— Killdeer have a brown back and white belly. They have two black bands across their chest. Their reddish-orange rump feathers can be seen when they fly.



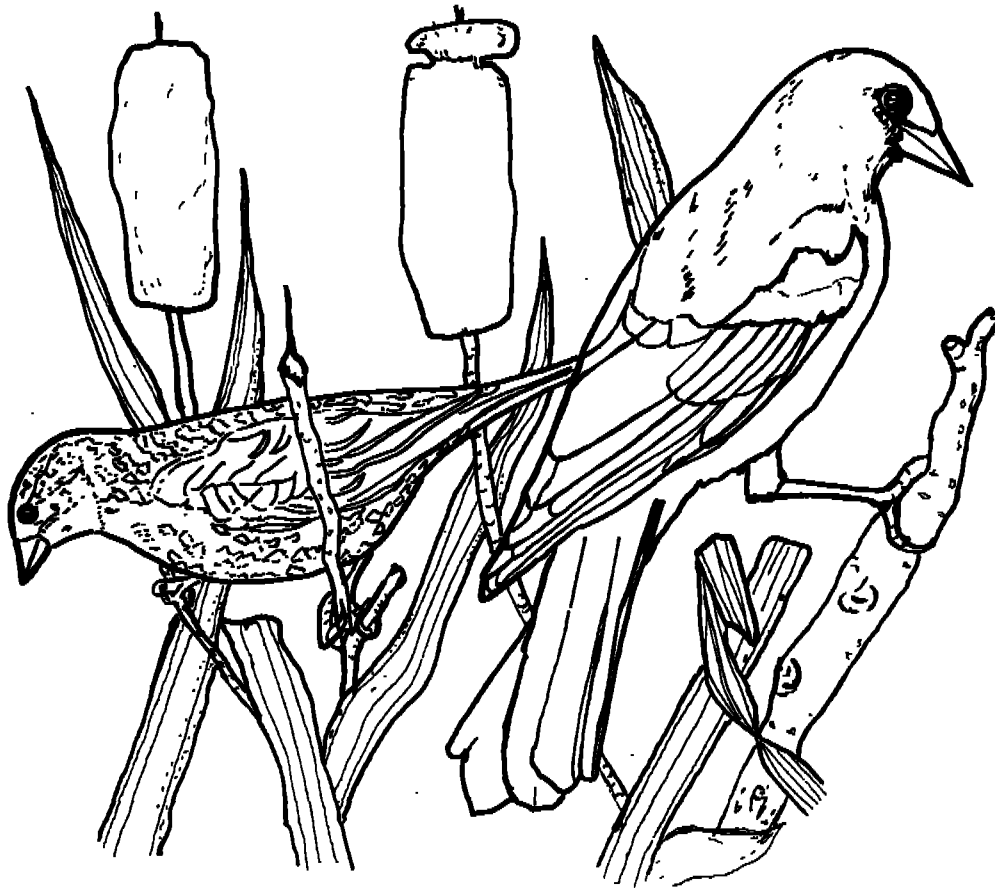
## MALLARD

The mallard is the best known of all the ducks. It is very common on lakes, ponds, marshes, and rivers. Sometimes it is seen on saltwater bays. The mallard has adapted to cities and towns, and it is the most common duck around where people live.

**Diet**— Mallards eat plants, seeds, and some insects in freshwater. They reach their food by tipping up, with their tail in the air and their head under water. Ducks that feed like this are called “dabbling” ducks. Other ducks, like the bufflehead, that swim completely under water are called “diving” ducks. Mallards and other dabbling ducks can take off from the water without first having to run to gain speed. The diving ducks have to run across the surface of the water before they are able to take off.

**Nesting**— Mallards nest on the ground, sometimes far from water. The nest is a hollow spot lined with leaves, grass, down, and feathers. It is placed under the cover of tall reeds, grass, or bushes. The female lays 10 to 12 eggs, and she incubates them for about one month. The ducklings can walk and swim shortly after hatching, and the female soon leads them to the safety of water. They learn to fly in 7 to 8 weeks.

**Colors**— The male mallard has a shiny green head, chestnut brown breast, grayish body, and some curled tail feathers. The female is brown. Both male and female have a blue patch of feathers on the wings.



## RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

The red-winged blackbird is the blackbird of marshes, slow-moving rivers, wet roadside ditches, and wet meadows. It sometimes visits farmers' fields to look for food, and it may come to neighborhood bird feeders, especially in the winter.

**Diet**— Blackbirds eat corn, grain, fruit, seeds of weeds, and insects. The young birds are fed insects.

**Nesting**— The nest of a red-winged blackbird is placed in cattails, reeds, and shrubs or low trees near water. The nest is a deep cup made of long leaves and stems that are woven around supporting twigs or stems. The nest is lined with small fibers of rushes and grasses. The female lays 4 eggs in late April or May and incubates them for about 11 days. The young leave the nest 11 days after hatching.

**Colors**— Male and female red-winged blackbirds look very different. Males are glossy black with bright red shoulder patches tipped with yellow. The male fluffs out its shoulder patch when it sings so that it can be seen more easily by other blackbirds. The male's song is a loud, gurgling *konk-la-reee* that ends in a trill. The song and red shoulder patch is its way of telling other males to stay out of its territory. It also attracts the female. The female is smaller and is brown on its backside and heavily streaked on its underside.

The **yellow-headed blackbird** is common around freshwater marshes of eastern Washington during the spring and summer. The male has a yellow head and breast, black wings and body, and a white patch on the wings. The female is dark brown with yellow on its cheek and throat.

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